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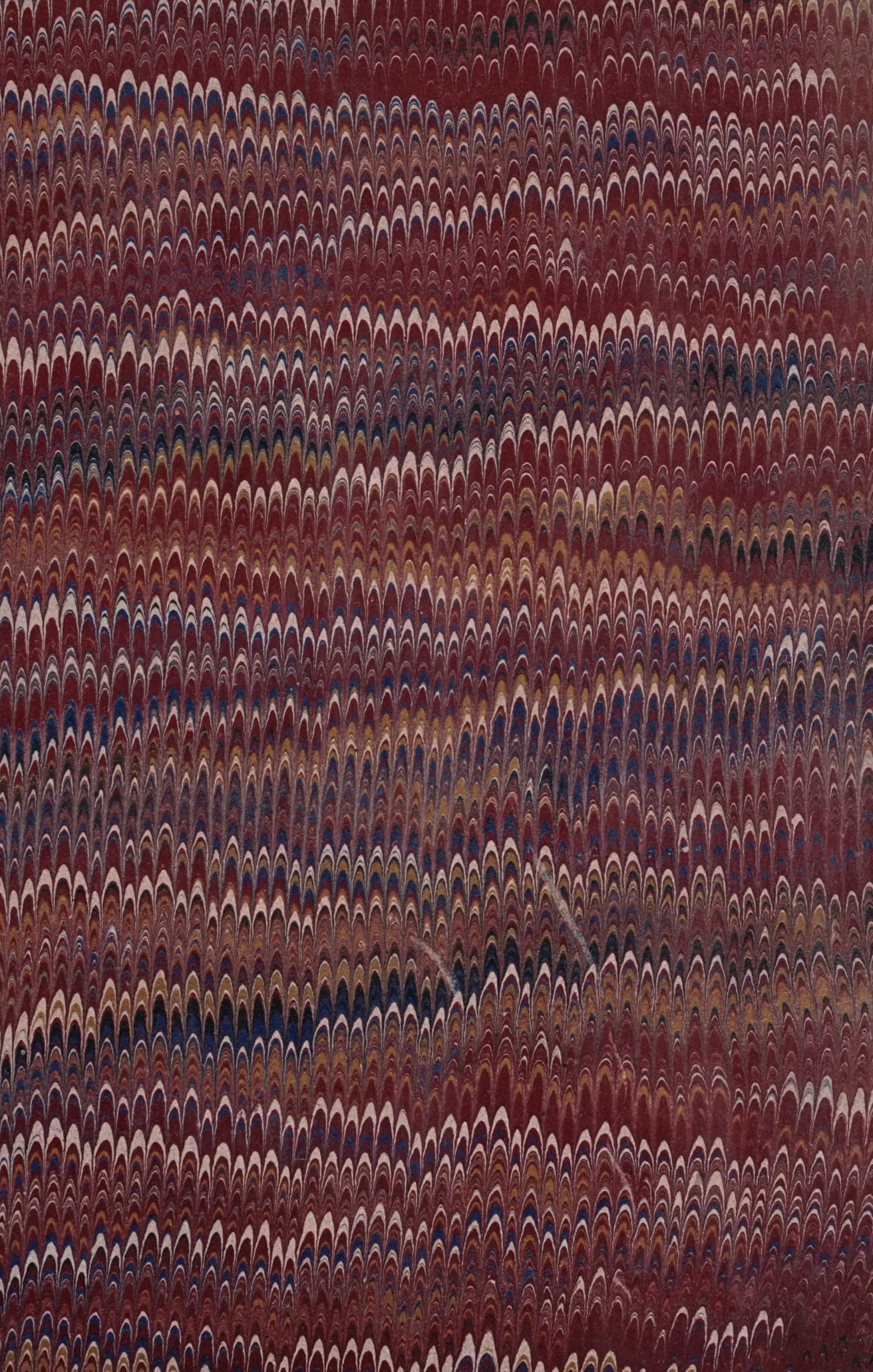
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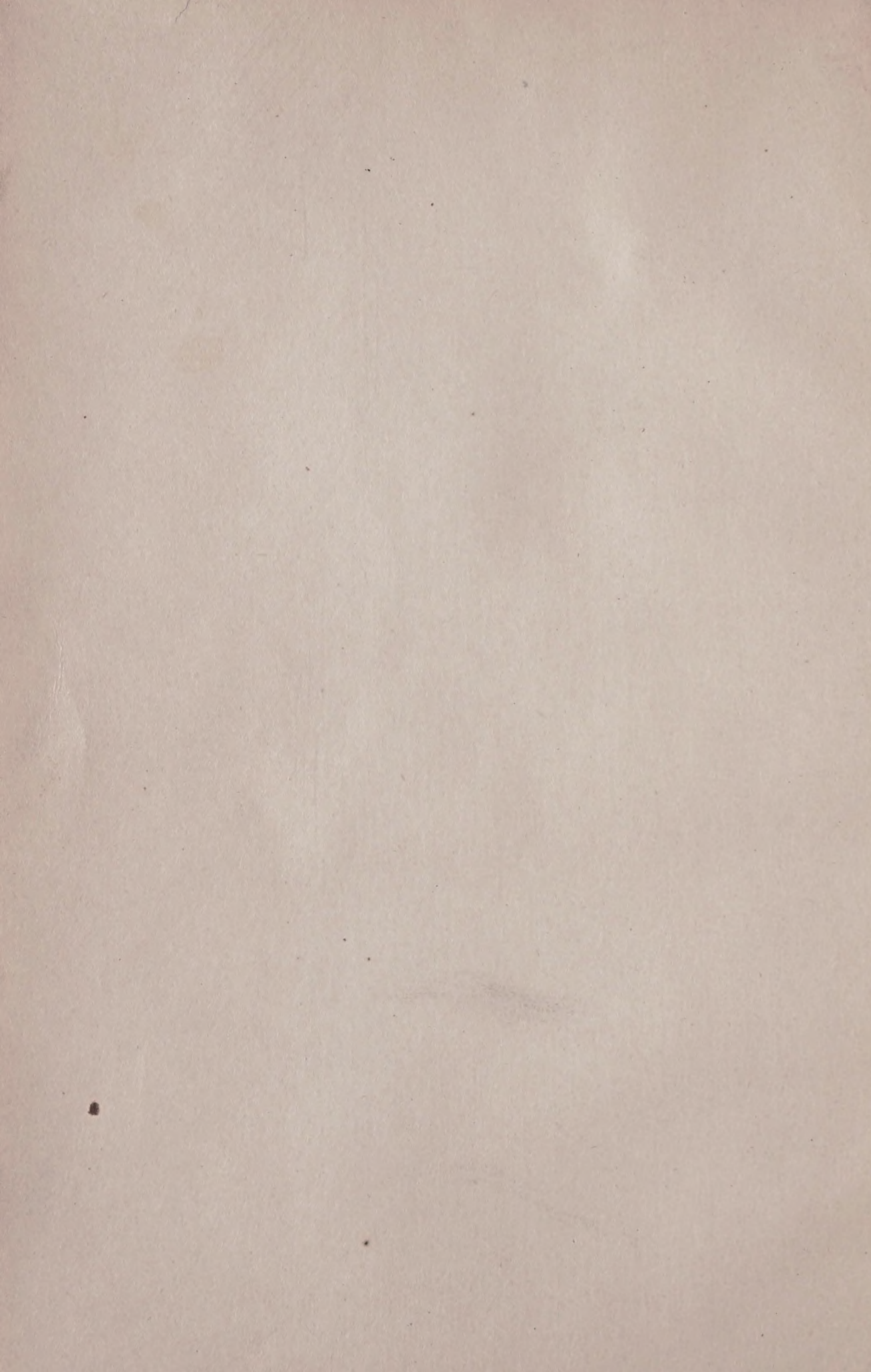
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BETTY'S VISIONS

BY

RHODA BROUGHTON

AUTHOR OF "SECOND THOUGHTS," "BELINDA,"
ETC., ETC.

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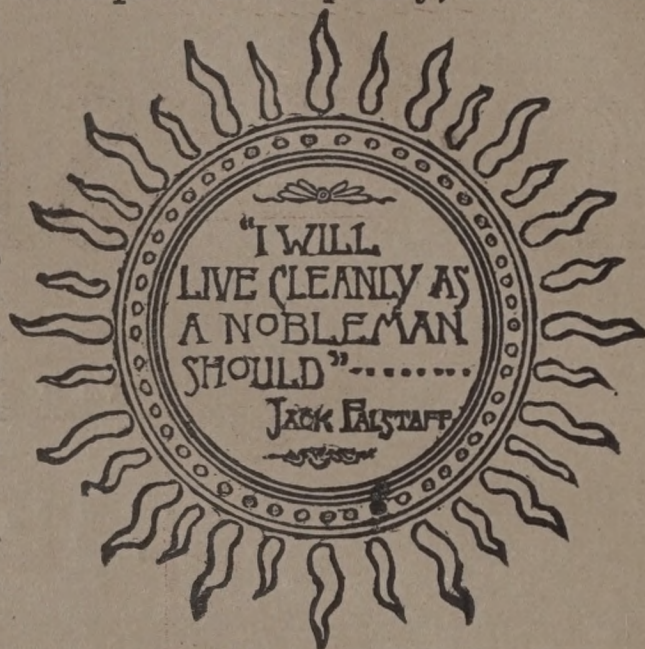
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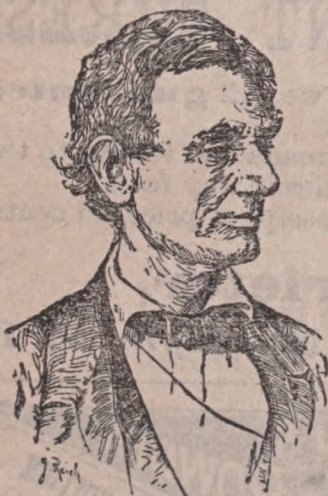
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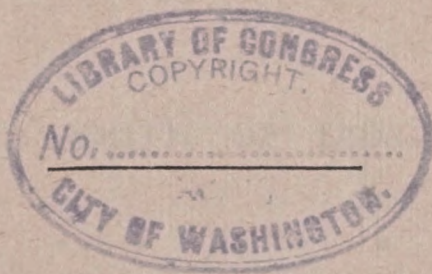
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MRS. SMITH OF LONGMAINS

✓ BY

/ RHODA BROUGHTON

AUTHOR OF "NANCY," "COMETH UP AS A FLOWER," ETC.,



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BETTY'S VISIONS.

HER FIRST VISION.

"I CAN see nothing *unnatural* about her!" says the mother, with an aggrieved accent on the adjective. "She is a remarkably nice child, if that is *unnatural*. Everyone says she is a remarkably nice child, everyone but you."

"Did I say that she was not a remarkably nice child?" retorts he, nettled; "should I be likely to say that my own child was not a nice child?"

"You said that she was *unnatural*,

what more could you have said of her if she had had two heads?"

"How you harp upon a mere word!" replies he, crossly, "if I said *unnatural*, I only meant that she was not like other children!"

"It, as I incline to think, since Rachel's arrival, to be like other children means to be voracious, idle, and uncivil, I am not sorry she is unlike other children."

Perhaps because he feels that he is getting the worst of it, Mr. Brewster declines into silence, and walking to the window, stands there, whistling subduedly, and watching the object of dispute and her cousin Rachel, both at present visible upon the lawn. But, though they are both in the same place, their occupations are dissimilar. Rachel, seated in the fork of the mulberry tree, to which she had hoydenishly climbed, is gnawing an unripe apple, rudely snatched,

half-eaten, from one of the boys ; while little Betty, the daughter of the house, is soberly walking over the sward beside a stout, middle-aged gentleman, one of whose hands she is quietly caressing with both hers.

“ Uncommonly fond little Miss of her uncle !” resumed Mr. Brewster, presently, in a not very complacent tone ; “ I never heard of any child being so fond of an uncle. I am sure I was not when I was a boy. I remember one of mine giving me a precious good licking because I filled his top-boots with cold water !”

“ And richly you deserved it !” retorts his wife.

“ But as to Miss Betty,” continued he.

“ *Miss Betty* is a very amiable child,” interrupts Mrs. Brewster, with a not altogether amiable accent on her daughter’s name.

“ I never said she was not,” rejoins

he, with a testiness born of the implied slur upon the amiability of his own infancy. "All I say is that there is something un——

"Natural, he is going to add ; but, bethinking himself in time how gravely displeasing the expression is to his wife, he pulls himself up. Perhaps she is grateful to him for his self-control. Perhaps the various little shafts she has winged at him have eased her spleen, for she says presently, in a far better humoured voice——

"She is uncommonly fond of him ; of course he is a very good fellow, being your brother" (with a little malicious laugh) ; "how could he help being ? But I confess I cannot see his attraction. I really do not know," she adds, thoughtfully, "how I shall break to the child that he is going on Tuesday."

"Whatever you do, do not put it off

till the last moment," says he, hastily, "or we shall be having a scene."

"She never makes scenes," replies Mrs. Brewster, coldly.

"I wish she did ; she would not feel things so deeply if she made scenes."

"Well, as he is only going for a fortnight to Maidenhead," returns Betty's father, with a short laugh, "in my humble opinion it will be rather a waste of deep feeling in this case ; it is like the parson who preached from the text ' Knowing well that they should see his face no more,' and took an affecting farewell of his congregation when he was only going by penny boat down to Margate."

"You must remember that to a child a fortnight is as long as two years would be to old people like you and me," replies his wife, passing by with grave contempt the dubious facetiousness of

her husband's illustration ; and as she speaks she leaves the room.

The dreaded Tuesday has come. The carriage that bears away the beloved Uncle John has driven from the door. The whole family—gathered to bid him God speed on the door-step—have again dispersed to their various avocations. Rachel, having pumped up a few noisy and unnecessary tears—tears speedily dried by half a dozen cobnuts thrust into her hand by the warmest-hearted of the boys—has gone off rabbiting with the latter, forgetful and elate ; a bag of ferrets in her lily hand. Betty, who, on the contrary, has not cried at all, remains rooted to the doorstep, silent and still ; her eyes fastened to the spot where the departing vehicle had last blessed her sight.

“ Why, in Heaven's name, if she is so cut up, cannot she cry ? ” says Mr. Brewster to his wife, as they saunter

away together towards the garden. "If Rachel or the boys are in trouble, one cannot hear oneself speak for the noise of their sorrow; I do not care what you say, there is something unna——"

The forbidden word dies half spoken on his lips.

"She will get over it," replies the mother, throwing back a compassionate look at the disconsolate little figure still rooted to the doorstep; "she will outgrow it. I believe that I was a very odd child, and you must own"—(laughing)—"that there is nothing very odd about me now."

Five days have passed. "July, as Horace Walpole said, 'has set in with its usual severity.'" After a briefer spell of tantalising sunshine, just to show what weather can and ought to be, ——shire has relapsed into its normal state of drip, drip. It has poured all day. All day the rooms have rung with the din of the

bored and house-bound children. From the schoolroom have issued noisesome smells of amateur cooking ; squeals as of a pinched Rachel ; yells, as of retaliated-upon boys ; yelps of trodden-on dogs ; Bob's voice ; Bill's voice ; Geoffrey's voice ; highest, shrillest of all, Rachel's voice. But among all the voices, there is not to be detected one tone of little Betty's. She is not even with them ; is not even playing her usual part of meek *souffre douleur*. All through the rainy day she has sat alone in a disused attic, often haunted by her, sat among old trunks and family pictures that have had their day, and now live with their pale faces to the wall ; has sat watching those cunning mathematicians, the spiders, spin their nice webs ; and the ittle nervous mice dart noiselessly in and out of their wainscot homes. It has grown dark now ; too dark, one would think, even for the spiders to see to weave

their webs, but perhaps they do not need sight. Perhaps they go on weaving, weaving all through the night. Mrs. Brewster is sitting in her boudoir. Her husband is dining out, and she is alone. It is not an evening on which one would choose to be alone; an evening on which the wet tree boughs slap the window, and the rain comes sometimes even down the chimney; making the fire spit and fizz. It is the sort of evening on which, looking out into the straining dusk, one might expect to see a Ban-shée's weird face pressed against the pane. Some such nervous thought as this has prompted Mrs. Brewster to stretch out her hand to the bell, to ring for the servant to draw the curtains, when the door noiselessly opens, and her little daughter enters.

"Betty!" cries the mother, in a cross tone, for there is something ghostly and that harmonizes with her vague

fears, in the child's soundless mode of entry, "not in bed yet? It is nine o'clock! What do you mean?"

Betty makes no answer. She has silently advanced out of the shadows that enwrap the further end of the room, into the little radius of red light diffused by the wood fire.

"What is the matter with you? Why do you not speak?" cries Mrs. Brewster, irritably. The child is beside her now, and her eyes are lifted to her mother's; and yet the latter feels that they are somehow not looking at her, but, as it were, at some object beyond her.

"What is the matter with you?" repeats she, with growing nervous ill-humour, shaking the little girl by the shoulder.

Then Betty speaks. "Uncle John is dead!" she says, in a level, dreaming voice. "I know it; he touched me on the shoulder as he passed by."

“What nonsense are you talking?” cries Mrs. Brewster, angrily. “How can Uncle John have touched you when he is a hundred and twenty miles away? What do you mean by telling such a silly falsehood?”

The child does not answer. She neither retracts nor re-asserts her statement. She only stands perfectly still, with that odd, unseeing look in her eyes.

“If you do not know how to behave more rationally you had better go to bed,” says the mother, displeased and frightened—she scarcely knows at what—and noiselessly and still, as if in a dream, Betty obeys.

The morning has come, and it and the sunshine it has brought with it, have dispersed and routed the eerie terrors of the night.

Sitting in her light and cheerful boudoir, Mrs. Brewster has forgotten with how creepy a feeling she had looked in-

to its dark corner over night. She has forgotten also Betty's strange speech, and her own ire at it. She is smiling to herself at the recollection of some little whimsical incident of his dinner party, retailed to her by her husband, when that husband enters.

"A telegram?" says she, seeing a flimsy pink paper in his hand. "From whom? No bad news, I hope?" She says it without violent emotion, all that the world holds of great importance to her being safely housed within the same walls as she.

Mr. Brewster does not answer.

"From John, I suppose?" suggests she, calmly. "He is coming back sooner than he intended."

Then, surprised at his silence and looking up for the first time into his face—
"Good heavens, what is it?"

For all answer he puts the paper into her hand, and her eye in an instant has

drunk its contents. "From Mr. Smith, Skindle's Hotel, Maidenhead. To Mr. Brewster, Taplington Grange, ——shire. Accident on the river last night. Col. Brewster drowned. Body just recovered. Come at once."

Mrs. Brewster has turned very pale ; but at such news a change of colour is not surprising.

"Last night !" she says, Betty's speech flashing suddenly back upon her mind.

"What time last night ? It does not say what time."

"What does the exact time matter ?" replies he, gruffly ; turning away his head with an Englishman's unconquerable aversion from being seen, even by a wife, under the influence of any emotion. He had liked his brother ; and is thinking of the time when they were little boys together.

"It does matter !" she cries, excitedly.
"It does ! it does !"

But he has left the room to give hasty directions relative to his departure, which immediately follows. On the next day he returns, bringing with him his brother's body, and such details of the catastrophe that had caused that brother's death, as are ever likely to be arrived at. Upon that ill-starred evening, the weather at Maidenhead, unlike that in ——shire, had been fine, and Colonel Brewster had, according to his frequent habit after dinner, taken a boat and sculled himself on the river. He had not returned at his usual hour, which excited some slight surprise at the hotel, but not much alarm was felt until early on the ensuing morning, when his hat was brought in by a countryman, who had found it near the bank of the river, and had also seen a skiff floating, keel uppermost, further out in the stream. Drags were immediately procured, and after half an hour's search the body was discovered half a mile

lower down the river in a bed of rushes. By what accident the boat had capsized, and its occupant, an excellent swimmer, lost his life, will probably never be known. Only the fact remains, that on the evening of his death his niece, at the distance of one hundred and twenty miles away, had become aware of its having taken place. She expressed no surprise at the news, nor ever revealed, further than by that one sentence, how she had become apprised of it. **This was her First Vision.**

HER SECOND VISION.

TIME has been galloping away. It has begun to gallop even with Betty ; for she is grown up. At eighteen, time gallops, though not violently ; at thirty-eight, it outstrips an express train ; and at fifty-eight it leaves the electric telegraph behind it. Betty is eighteen, and full - grown. No longer is she measured, with heels together and chin tucked in, against the school-room door ; since, for the last year, she has continued stationary at that final inch in the paint ; which proclaims that her height is to remain at five feet five inches until, that is, the epoch, which arrives sooner than we expect it, when she will begin to grow down again. She has developed into a demure, pale comeliness ; and no

one any longer thinks her odd. Her father no longer considers her as unnatural; and his altercations with her mother on the subject of her (Betty's) eccentricities have long died into silence. At eighteen, there is nothing eccentric in being indifferent to dolls, and averse from ferrets; in speaking with a soft voice, and liking rather to walk than to run, in seeking solitude, and being able to look at a loaded apple tree without any desire to swarm up it. With the good word of many, and the ill word of few, Betty takes her still course along life's path; a little thrown into the shade, perhaps, by her cousin Rachel, who has shot up into a very fine young woman—a splendid young female athlete, whose achievements in hunting - field, or on frozen river, in ball - room, or on tennis-ground, are admired by all the country side, and in the wake of whose

glories Betty follows with distant, un-envying humility.

It is a winter evening, crisp and stilly cold, and in the once school-room now elevated and transmogrified by the aid of a clean paper and a few girlish gim-cracks into a grown-up sitting - room, are the cousins. They are standing side by side at the window, having pulled back the curtain, and are looking out, as well as the hard frost-flowers on the pane will let them, at the moon-ennobled snow.

"You will have a moon!" says Betty.

"At this time to-morrow, as nearly as possible, I shall be getting there," rejoins Rachel, with a sort of dance in her voice. "I wish they had asked you too."

"I do not think that I do," says Betty, reflectively; letting her finger travel slowly down the window, in

the effort—a vain one, since they are on the other side of the glass — to reach the airy frost trceries. “I do not think that I enjoy things much at first hand. When you come back and describe them they sound entrancing!”

“I do not see how this visit can help being entrancing!” cries Rachel, pursuing her own joyous anticipations—

“And yet visits do help it,” answers Betty, with gentle cynicism.

“Two balls and a play! Skating if it freezes; hunting if it thaws!” continues Rachel, triumphantly; checking off on her fingers her promised pleasures. I cannot think why they did not ask you!”

“I can,” replies Betty, with a grave smile, “since they could get the plums without the dough, they were quite wise to do so; but,” (with a change of tone to a wistful

intonation) "however delightful they may be, you will come home for Christmas?"

"By the number of times you have asked me that question it is evident that you think I shall not," answers Rachel, with a good-humoured impatience.

"There is nobody cheers up mother in the way you do," pursues Betty, leaning her elbow on the sill and looking pensively out at the steely December stars. "If one wanted a proof, which one does not, of what a melancholy world this is, one would have it in the fact of the extreme gratitude that people feel for mere animal spirits in anyone."

"Mere animal spirits!" repeats Rachel, laughing lightly, "thank you for the compliment."

"I really do not know how I shall break it to the boys if you do

not come back for the Workhouse tea and the servants' ball," says Betty, gravely.

"But I shall! I shall! I shall!" cries the other, resolutely; "dead or alive you will see me back on Christmas Eve!" She repeats the assertion emphatically at her departure next day, leaning a radiant face out of the brougham window to blow kisses to the three grave persons assembled on the doorstep, and to bid her God - speed, as they and she had assembled to bid Uncle John God-speed some seven years ago.

"She will have a moon," says Betty, following with her serious, youthful eyes the carriage as it rolls briskly away.

"She ought to be there in a couple of hours. It is not more than eighteen miles, and the roads are good. Gad! it is cold!" says Mr. Brewster, rub-

bing his hands and turning to re-enter the house, whither his wife has already preceded him, and resumed her occupation of that sofa where, from some real or imagined sickness, she now spends the major part of her life. There, some good while later, her husband finds her stretched, discomposed and fretful. Her work is disarranged ; her silks are mixed ; she cannot sort the colours by candle-light ; Rachel always managed them for her.

“She must be nearly at Hinton now,” says Mr. Brewster, intermitting for a moment his back-warming process to glance at the clock on the chimney-piece behind him, and glad of a topic by which to divert the current of his wife’s complaints, “the roads are good, and there is a moon as big as a cart wheel. I am glad I did not let her have the young

horses, as she wanted," pursues he, in a self-congratulatory tone; "they take a great deal of driving."

"I cannot think what I am to do without her for a whole week," sighs Mrs. Brewster, pettishly. "Who is to tell whether this is blue or green?" sitting up and helplessly comparing two skeins of filosel by the light of the shaded lamp that stands beside her couch. "Where is Betty? She would be better than nobody. I do not know how it is," with a distinct access of fractiousness, "but that girl always manages to be out of the way whenever one wants her."

"Talk of the devil," cries her father, cheerfully; "here she is." And in effect, as he speaks, his daughter enters, and moves slowly to the fire.

"Your eyes are better than mine, Betty," says the mother, holding out her dubious silks for her child's inspection;

then suddenly, as she lifts her look to the girl's face, changing her tone, "what is the matter with you?" she asks, abruptly; "how odd you look!"

Betty has paused beside her mother's sofa; and her eyes, wide open, yet unseeing as those of a somnambulist, are fixed unthinkingly upon her.

"Rachel is dead," she says, in a distinct, level, passionless voice, as of one speaking in a dream. "I know it! She touched me on the knee as she went by."

Mr. Brewster has dropped his coat tails, and Mrs. Brewster her silks, and both are staring open-mouthed, aghast, and dumb at their daughter. Mr. Brewster is the first to recover his speech.

"What gibberish are you talking?" cries he, roughly; putting his hand on the girl's wrist. "Are you walk-in your sleep? Wake up!"

But Betty makes no answer. She turns slowly, as one who has accomplished her errand, and walks as dreamily out of the room as she had entered it.

Mrs. Brewster has tottered up from her sofa, trembling like a leaf, and crying copiously.

"How can you pay any heed to such rubbish?" asks her husband, angrily. "The girl is hysterical. She would be all the better for having a bucket of cold water thrown over her. We have always let her have her own way too much, that is it."

But Mrs. Brewster is sobbing violently.

"Do you not remember?" she cries. "It was just the same, she said just the same years ago, when she was a child, when John died."

"Fiddlesticks," says he, in a fury. "Who would have expected a woman

of your sense to be so puerilely superstitious? A mere coincidence. Rachel dead! Ha! ha! She must have been pretty quick about it. Come now, think" — (laying his hand friendly and reasonably upon her trembling shoulder) — "what is likely to have happened to her in less than two hours? If she had had the young horses, I grant you, it would have been a different thing, but as it is—there, that is better. Let me get you some salvolatile, and when next I see Miss Betty I will give her a piece of my mind for upsetting you in this way."

Mr. Brewster's eloquence, though not of a very lofty order, is yet of sufficient force gradually to soothe his wife into comparative composure, and, when to his reasonings he has added the promise, given with a good - humoured shrug, that a ser-

vant on horseback shall be sent off first thing in the morning to inquire after Rachel's welfare, the poor lady is so far restored to her normal state of faint and intermittent cheerfulness, that she is able to sit down to dinner with tolerable appetite. Betty does not appear; which, though neither of her parents confess it, is a relief to both. Mr. Brewster is not generally much given to table-talk. Being of a hungry and slightly epicure turn, he is of opinion that it is impossible to do two things well at once, but to-day he puts forth his powers magnanimously to amuse his wife; and the ball of talk is flying briskly from one to the other, when the butler, approaching his master, and even so far breaking through the traditions of his trade as to interrupt him in the middle of a speech, informs him in an under-

tone "that there is a person in the hall who wishes to speak to him."

"Let him wish!" says Mr. Brewster, somewhat surly at having the thread of his eloquence untimely snapped. "Did not you tell him I was at dinner? He may wait."

"If you please, sir, he says he must see you," rejoins the butler, with respectful persistence. "I beg your pardon, sir," (lowering his voice still further, and looking meaningly towards Mrs. Brewster, whose attention is at the moment wholly occupied by the feeding of a couple of cats) "but I think you had better see him."

There is something so odd and emphatic in the servant's manner, that, without offering any further objection, Mr. Brewster jumps up and hastens into the adjoining hall. There seem to be several persons

in it; maid-servants whimpering with their aprons to their eyes; but the centre of interest is obviously a young man, leaning with shaking limbs and a sheet-white face, against the oak table in the middle of the hall. Instantly, Mr. Brewster has recognised him as one of the sons of the house to which his niece had gone. In a moment he is beside him.

"What is it?" he says, hoarsely. Then, as the young fellow struggles in vain for utterance, "What is it?" he repeats, shaking him by the shoulder. "In God's name, speak out!"

Perhaps there is a bracing power in the harshness of his adjuration, for the stranger speaks.

"There — there has been an accident," he says, indistinctly. "Your—your niece——"

"Yes?"

"She—she."

Again he stops, looking as if he were about to faint.

"For God's sake, go on!" says Mr. Brewster, hoarsely. "Harris, give him some brandy."

It is not until he has swallowed it that the young man is able to proceed.

"At the corner of Hampton Lane, in a field, there was a rick on fire. The horses took fright, bolted, and upset the carriage into the ditch. Miss Brewster was thrown off."

"*Thrown off!* What do you mean? Why, she was inside!"

"She was driving. She had put the men - servants inside. She and her maid were on the box. She was thrown violently against some spiked iron railings, and when she was taken up she was ——"

"Dead?" asks Mr. Brewster, gripping the young man's arm and speaking in a husky whisper. "Dead?"

The attention of everyone in the room has been so wholly rivetted upon the speakers, that no one has perceived the opening of the dining-room door and the appearance of a figure on the threshold, until a terrible loud hysteric laugh breaks upon their ears.

"Dead?" shrieks Mrs. Brewster. "Dead? Then it was true; then Betty was right." And so falls heavily to the floor in a dead swoon.

HER THIRD VISION.

THE blow does not kill Mrs. Brewster. Her acquaintances are all agreed that it must, since for years past their and her doctor has gone about the neighbourhood proclaiming the unparalleled weakness of her heart. But apparently it is not so weak as he had imagined, since, after such a shock, it still goes on pulsing, however feebly. Weakly people, with one leg habitually planted in the grave, take a great deal of killing ; but the catastrophe turns her at once into a hopeless invalid. After that day she never resumes the habits of health. But as time goes on, her valetudinarian ways assume a permanence and stability with which

those about her as little connect the idea of change and death as with their own robuster modes of life. Never to appear till one o'clock in the afternoon, never to join her family at dinner, never to be seen except in a recumbent posture, never to be told anything disagreeable. These are the features of her case; features which may probably remain long after many of the healthy persons who come to visit her, and who insensibly sink and soften their voices on entering her dim and shaded room, have been carried, feet foremost, to the churchyard. It need hardly be said that no allusion either to her niece's violent death, or her daughter's strange prevision or it, is ever allowed in Mrs. Brewster's presence. And though no doctor has prohibited the communicating or any number of disagreeable truths to Mr.

Brewster, yet neither does he ever allude to the facts above referred to. To whom should he, indeed? To Betty, then? But as to Betty, both her lips are shut in a silence as close as that of death. On being told of her cousin's tragic end, she had expressed no more surprise than she had manifested seven years before, on hearing of the death by drowning, of her Uncle John. Not the slightest hint as to the mode in which the catastrophe had been communicated to her has ever fallen from her. It is even a matter of doubt to her father whether any consciousness or remembrance of it remains with her. Sometimes, as he sees her seated tranquilly working or quietly reading, with as humdrum and everyday an air as it is possible for any human being to be dressed in, a poignant desire assails him to question her as

to those strange and supernatural intimations, of which she has twice been the recipient. But always a sort of reluctant awe restrains him. And meanwhile, life flows dully by in the old house. The boys are out in the world, and return but seldom to the house whence their bright playfellow has been borne to the grave. There is nothing to amuse them when they do return, since the state of Mrs. Brewster's health precludes (or she thinks so, which comes to the same thing,) the possibility of society. Betty has quietly abandoned the world at eighteen, in order to devote herself more completely to her parents. To speak more exactly, to her parent; for Mr. Brewster is of a social turn, and would fain take his daughter into the world with him, making her an excuse for his own presence at festivities abroad

and merrymakings at home. But how can he have the inhumanity to set up his coarse and brutal claims against those far more sacred ones of his moribund wife? He is fond of music; but, since Rachel's fingers were stiffened in death, no one has dared to open the piano; the least hint of such an intention would re-plunge the sickly wife and mother into those terrible hysterics, from which it is the main end of life with her nearest kin to keep her and themselves. And so, poor, convivial Mr. Brewster, except when someone charitably asks him out to dinner, nods through the dull evenings over his newspaper, or tries to feign an interest he is far from feeling in the game of patience which is the one excitement of his good lady's life. In complete unconsciousness, that good lady pursues

her gentle way, quietly and simply accepting the sacrifice of the two lives daily offered on her invalid altar, and, with equal simplicity, the owners of those two lives unite in the cult of sanctified selfishness embodied in the charmingly dressed, diaphonous, prostrate being who has succeeded in delicately snuffing out all the mirth of their existence. It is three years since Rachel died, or, to speak more exactly, three years and a quarter, for it was in the deepest, blackest depth of winter that she went, and now the long-stretching light, the bold crocus rows, the courting thrushes, all tell that spring has come.

Betty is twenty-one years old, for it was in the spring that she came, a spring gift blown in by the bustling March winds.

"Twenty - one ! twenty - one !" she

says over to herself. It seems to her a great age. She wonders whether it strikes other people in the same light.

"Father!" she says, putting her arms about his neck as he sits running his eye rather disconsolately over the theatrical announcements in *The Times*, "Do you know what an elderly daughter you have got? I am twenty-one to-day!"

"Twenty-one?" repeats he, with a jump. "You do not say so. God bless my soul!"

He sighs heavily, but, trying to turn it off into a cough, cries cheerfully,

"Well, I am to give you a present, I suppose. Is that what it means? Well, what is it to be? A new gown—a necklace—what?"

But Betty shakes her head.

"I never wear out my old gowns, and who would see my necklace?"

"What do you say to a little outing?" asks he.

He says it in a low voice, as if he knew that it was a proposition of a contraband nature, and nervously glances over his shoulder as he makes it.

"A little jaunt—quite a little one. It is so long since you and I have had a jaunt together, Betty."

But again Betty shakes her head.

"Impossible!" she says, reproachfully; and yet a little regretfully, too. "How could mother spare us?"

"Not for long, of course," rejoins he, hastily, "but just a run up to London for a couple of nights. We might be there and back almost before she had time to miss us; just a run up to see a play."

"It is a long time" (rather ruefully) "since I have seen a play," says Betty.

She is leaning over his chair, her arms round his neck, and is reading the theatrical announcements with him.

"Lyceum, Strand, Vaudeville," she says, with a little sigh, that shows that she, too, is nibbling at the temptation. "How nice they all look!"

"We will do a couple of plays, Betty!" cries her father, audaciously, and in a higher key than he has yet spoken in. "I see that they are giving that old piece, 'The First Night,' at the Court. It was the first play I ever saw. My father took me to it when I was quite a little chap. Horace Wigan played in it. You do not remember Horace Wigan? No! Why should we not go to-morrow, eh?"

His daughter has put up her hand apprehensively to check him:

"Hush!" she says, hurriedly; "here

is mother!" And in effect, as she speaks, the folding-doors have been thrown open; and, as always happens at this hour of the day, Mrs. Brewster is wheeled slowly in on a couch out of her bedroom; Mrs. Brewster, prostrate, transparent, suffering, as usual. In a moment the husband's voice has sunk to a subdued invalid pitch:

"How are you to-day, dear?" he asks, hastening to his wife's side, and kindly taking her languid hand, "any better?"

"I shall never be better in this world," replies she, exhilaratingly; "but," (her sick eyes wandering suspiciously from one to the other of her two companions) "what is it that I am not to hear, Betty? Why did you say 'hush?'"

There is a moment of confused silence, uneasily broken by Mr. Brew-

ster. "Betty has been telling me that she is twenty-one to-day."

"She could hardly object to my hearing that," replies her mother, drily. "Come, Betty, what was it?"

"It was only that father was talking nonsense; you know that he does sometimes," replies the girl, with a little constrained laugh, kneeling down beside her mother's sofa, and raising her thin fingers.

"I am not at all sure that it was such nonsense, after all!" says he, speaking in a rather blustering voice, which his daughter knows to conceal much inward misgiving.

"I—I—was only proposing to—to—take her for a little outing, you see," (after a pause, as his proposition is received in entire silence) "you see," (growing nervous) "she—she has not a very lively time of it — for a girl mewed up with us two old people."

Still silence. At last, "I am sorry that you are so dull, Betty," says the invalid, in a wounded voice, withdrawing her hand. "Why did you not tell me so before?" But at this, poor Betty collapses into sobs.

"Good God!" cries Mr. Brewster, starting up and stamping about the room for a moment, forgetful of the sanctity of the spot. "I mean, bless me, Maria, my dear, what has the poor girl done?" Maria's answer is what the answer of any invalid who respects herself must inevitably be, a sinking flat back on her pillows, with hands and feet grown suddenly rigid, in a faint, so admirably counterfeited, as to take in even herself. Mr. Brewster is quietly, and perhaps a little compassionately, hustled out of the room by his daughter, and thus in disastrous ignominy his bold project ends. And yet—such are the tides

in the affairs of men—on that very day week he is buying *Worlds*, and *Truths*, and *Queens*, for Betty at the station, to beguile their joint journey up to London, for that very outing upon which Mrs. Brewster would seem to have put so complete an extinguisher. And, stranger still, it is Mrs. Brewster herself who sends them. Whether it is the sight of her patient daughter, or of her clumsy, yet most genuinely remorseful husband, or some pinch of her own not dead but only slumbering conscience that effects the change, is of little moment. Certain it is that it is effected.

“What day do you set off?” she asks, suddenly; one evening, as she lies with her eyes fixed on her daughter’s face; that unjoyous young face, which is bent with untiring gentleness over that piece of work of

her mother's which is eternally needing to be set right.

"Set off?" repeats Betty, lifting her head, and looking apprehensive and a little guilty. "Where to?"

"That is what you can tell me better than I can tell you," replies the mother, drily, with a faint shade of resentment still lingering against her will in her tone. "Your father was anything but explicit; he spoke of 'an outing;' that might mean Kamschatka or Kew."

"He—he was talking nonsense!" replies Betty, red and stammering.

"No, he was not," rejoins the mother, calmly; "but I was taken so ill—if you remember, it was on the day that I was taken so ill—that he had not time to explain."

This sincere attempt to displace her husband's unlucky suggestion and her own seizure from their natural

relation as cause and effect, an attempt which, as she knows in her own heart, takes in neither herself nor her daughter, brings a weak pink flush into the sick woman's cheek.

"He was talking nonsense!" repeats Betty, murmuringly; "men often do," she adds, with an audacious and illiberal generality.

"What he said was quite true," rejoins Mrs. Brewster, reflectively; "it is a cruelly dull life for a young thing like you."

"But I am not young!" cries Betty, eagerly; "I am old, old! If you only knew how old I feel inside."

"Well, if you do, I do not!" says Mrs. Brewster, with a sort of tremulous playfulness. "To tell you the truth, I think we have been mewing ourselves up a great deal too much of late; that we should

be all the better for having a little air from the outer world let in upon us ; in short," (laughing nervously) "I have half a mind to join in your outing myself."

"Oh, if you could!" cries the girl, kneeling down by her mother, and laying her head caressingly on the pillow beside the invalid ; "but since you cannot——"

"Since I cannot," interrupts the other with decision ; "you must go instead of me, and come back and tell me all about it. There, say no more. That is settled."

And settled, despite Betty's many tearful and compunctious remonstrances, it is. The day has come. Betty has, as nearly as possible, lost the train through her inability, at the last moment, to tear herself away from that shaded room and that couch that of late have been all her world.

“Are you sure that you can do without us? Are you sure that you will not miss us?” she reiterates, with her eyes full of tears; and half-a-dozen of Mr. Brewster’s impatient “Bettys” are turned a deaf ear to by his daughter. But at last he gets her away; at last he gets her to the station and into the train. She had set off in a most unenjoying mood—apprehensive, half remorseful—but she has not gone five miles before nature and youth resume their inevitable sway. Did ever express train rush with so smooth a speed? and how pleasant once again to see the flying hedges, browsing sheep, smoky towns galloping away together. Gallop as they may, they are yet stationary, and she is tearing onwards. What a feeling of superiority it gives one! And then, when London is reached, what can be

more exhilarating and amusing than the streets? They seem to present a broad farce, got up and acted expressly for her entertainment. And the real farce to which they go in the evening? It is not very funny, but they laugh till they cry over it. Their mirth is so uncontrollable, indeed, that one or two persons in the stalls near them turn their heads to look in astonishment at them. But then, perhaps, these persons laugh every night. Mr. Brewster and his daughter are still laughing over the threadbare jests in their sitting-room at the hotel on their return. They are still laughing when Mr. Brewster leaves the room to give some directions to the servant for the next day. He is not absent more than ten minutes. On his return, he finds Betty standing in the middle of the room. Her face is turned towards

him, but, as he sees at the first glance, it is not the same face as that with which he had left her. There is no smile upon it, nor any expression of recognition. It wears the look which he has once before seen upon it—the sightless stare of a somnambulist. An indefinable terror seizes him as he goes up to her.

“What is the matter with you?” he asks, unsteadily. “Why do you look so odd?”

“We must go home,” she says, speaking in a mechanical, immodulated voice, as one in a trance, to whom the words are dictated by some resistless alien power. “Mother is dead! She touched me on the foot as she went by.”

They are nearly the same words as those which Mr. Brewster had heard his daughter employ on the occasion of her cousin's death; but

this time he can meet them with no derisive incredulity. A sudden trembling has seized him, such as had seized upon his sick wife on that former occasion.

"What do you mean?" he asks, almost in a whisper—"did you—did you *see* her?"

She makes no answer; only moves slowly towards the door of the adjoining bedroom.

"Betty!" cries the father, in an agony of apprehension, following her, "you *must* speak! You have no right to say such things! What did you see? In God's name tell me what *did you* see?"

But she is as if she heard him not. Without making any answer she passes out of sight. Something tells him that it would be vain to make any further appeals to her. It is even extremely doubtful whether she

was aware of his presence. He throws himself into an arm chair, and then, rising, begins to walk fast and feverishly up and down the room, in the vain endeavour to shake off the panic that is mastering him.

“The girl is of an exceptionally nervous organisation. She has been upset by this sudden change from the long gloom of her past life; it is a form of hysteria.”

But even as he says to himself these reassuring phrases, a cold reminiscence checks them. He had called her hysterical on the occasion of that former warning. His eyes fall accidentally on the clock. The hand points to half-past twelve. The thought crosses his mind with a sort of relief that all the telegraph offices must be shut. The only sensible course to pursue is to dismiss the matter as quickly as possible from

his mind, go to bed and dream, if he can compass it, of the farce, whose merriment seems now to be parted from him by a chasm. But to go to bed is one thing; to go to sleep another. Mr. Brewster finds the one as difficult as the other was easy. Reason as he may with himself, chide, ridicule his own folly, there is not one hour of the night or early morning that he does not hear told by all the church and hotel clocks. From the short, tired doze, into which he falls at last, he is awakened by the opening of the door, and springs back to consciousness with a frightened jump. Pooh! it is only his man with his hot water! And so it is. But, beside the hot water, what is it that his valet is carrying in his hand? Is it not an envelope, the first glimpse of whose colour turns the master sick? In a

second he has snatched it, torn it open, mastered its short contents, which, after all, he had already known. "Come home at once. Mrs. Brewster died suddenly **at** twelve last night."

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Mr. Brewster and his daughter have returned to the so lately left home. It is the day before the funeral, and they are sitting together in that heavy idleness which characterises such dread days. It is a dark afternoon, and the gloom is so greatly deepened by the lowered blinds that occupation would be difficult. They are holding each other's hands, as if that helped them a little. For nearly an hour neither has spoken, but suddenly Mr. Brewster breaks the leaden silence.

"Betty," he says, in a low voice, "how did you know? Did you see

her? I asked you at the time, but you did not answer me. You did not seem to hear."

She hears him now at all events, for her hand first trembles violently in his clasp, and is then withdrawn from it. But neither now does she answer.

"Tell me," repeats the father with imploring urgency, "Betty, tell me, did you see her?"

Betty has put up her hand to her forehead, and into her face has come an expression of dazed, bewildered misery.

"I don't know," she answers, uncertainly.

"You do not know?" repeats he, with gathering excitement; "you *must* know! Think, child, think! You cannot have forgotten; did you really *see* her?"

The look of puzzled wretchedness grows intenser.

"Oh, do not ask me," she cries, loudly, in a voice of acute pain. "I would tell you if I could, but—I—I—do not know."

Her voice dies slowly away at the last word into a wail of misery, and on her forehead the intense look as of one agonising to overtake a gone memory, grows more painfully evident. It would be inhumanity to urge her further, so the problem has to be left **as unsolved as ever.**

HER FOURTH VISION.

ANOTHER year has slipped by. Poor Mrs. Brewster's sudden death has long been superseded as a topic of conversation in the neighbourhood by less threadbare ones. To tell the truth, it had never been a subject of universal lamentation. Even into the very earliest expressions of pity and regret have crept hopes, that, when the days of mourning for the poor lady are ended, the house may be once more open for social purposes. And now that the year of conventional seclusion is running to its last sands, faint signs of such an impending re-opening are not altogether wanting, to gladden the hearts of the dancing boys and girls in the

vicinage. Mr. Brewster is far from being an old man. At fifty-five, under healthy conditions, there is still a great deal of enjoying power left in a man, and Betty is undeniably a young woman. At twenty-two, in fact, she is, and looks, a younger woman than she was and did at twenty-one. Betty and her father would account it blasphemy were you to hint such a thing to them, but in point of fact they are a great deal happier than they were while their suffering Maria yet blessed them with her presence and her sofa. The sofa had been reverently wheeled into a corner, the rooms are again full of light and air. Mr. Brewster need no longer tone down his hearty voice lest it should break into some doze, snatched fitfully at unexpected moments of the day. Betty need no longer cut short her stroll in the

garden, or her rides in the lanes, in the fear that a faint, complaining voice may be summoning her, and she out of hearing. They have both, to do them justice, honestly tried to check the first weak germs of cheerfulness in themselves and each other, but in vain. Little innovations, for which neither knew whom to blame, have crept in somehow. The tennis ground, long disused, has been new-mown, rolled, and marked out; occasionally, a young man or a girl, driving over to call, has lured Betty, reluctant at first, half-shocked and yet hankering, into a game. Occasionally, too, one such young guest, a man, has stayed so late that it would be a breach of the first elements of hospitality not to invite him to stay to dinner. And somehow, after dinner—if one has a guest, one must do what one can to amuse him.

All three have strayed into the billiard - room, and knocked the balls about till the stable clock has tolled midnight. This one guest, after a while, becomes singled out from the other chance comers, by the frequency and regularity of his appearances. Without any but a tacit invitation, he has fallen into the habit of coming, first on all Mondays; next on all Mondays and Fridays; then on all Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; by-and-bye he occasionally throws in a Sunday too; and sometimes a Saturday, if he has anything particular to say. Perhaps, being a moderately well-to-do-squire, with an agent whom he has no reason for distrusting, and a house which, though of comfortable dimensions for two, is over roomy for one, he is thankful to find a complaisant small family on whom he can bestow his too abundant leisure. It

is a Thursday evening, and Mr. Brewster and his daughter are sitting *tête - a - tête* after dinner; he turning over the sheets of the just-arrived *Globe*, she placidly stitching opposite him, when a ring at the hall door bell is heard through the house. Rings at the front door are, in the depth of the country, not common occurrences at nine o'clock in the evening, and are wont to excite surprise if not alarm. Such, however, is not the emotion provoked in the master of the house on this occasion. He looks over the top of his *Globe* at his daughter, who shows no great eagerness to meet his eye, and says, lifting his brows, with an expression half reproachful, half humourous, "Again, Betty? Why, I thought this was our free day, did not you?"

"Free day!" repeats Betty, stammering. "Free from what? I—I—don't know what you mean!"

"I am sure you do not; of course not; you cannot give a guess," replies her father, drily.

There is a smile on his lips, but his eyes are vexed. He has just begun to enjoy his life again, good, easy man, and in that enjoyment Betty's presence is a main factor. She hears, and is stung by the annoyance in his tone. Running impulsively over to him, she sits down on the floor at his knee.

"Do you think he comes too often?" she asks, trembling. "Do you mind?"

"It is to be hoped for my sake that I do not," rejoins he, still more drily than before; then, lifting by force the girl's face, which she has buried on the arm of his chair, "Why, Betty, you are as red as a turkey cock. You traitor, you knew he was coming. Might I ask—with

an ungovernable intonation of bitterness and alarm—whether he has anything particular to say?"

Steps are heard in the hall. The servants, who have not hurried themselves, are going to the door. She must make haste to answer.

"Do you mind?" she repeats, agitatedly. "If you do, he shall go away; he shall say nothing."

For a moment Mr. Brewster struggles, and it would be, perhaps, rash to say that no malediction against his future son-in-law formulates itself in his heart. Then, his natural unselfishness, which was kept in high training through many years by his sainted Maria, conquers, and he says cheerfully, "Mind? Why should I mind? Do you think that I want to have a cranky old maid on my hands?" Then, as the door opens and the guest is announced, "How

are you, Carrington? Very glad to see you."

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Two months later, Carrington and Betty are made one. Mr. Brewster has been the life of the wedding party, has made a better speech and more jokes, and has thrown more shoes and rice than any other member of the company. When the last guest has gone, he shuts himself into his study and cries like a child. Then he has his portmanteau packed, and takes the night mail for London and Paris. His empty house, void now both of his poor, peevish Maria and his consoling Betty, is more than he can bear. He is absent above a year, his travels being extended beyond the familiar bounds of Europe to China and Japan. What is there to bring him back? But at the end of the year there is some:

thing. Does not obligation lie upon him to go home and see Betty's baby? The thought of Betty with a baby makes him laugh, albeit tenderly. And then, at the close of a long summer day's travelling, comes the re-union with Betty herself. Betty, who cannot hang long enough about his neck, or reproach him fondly enough with his protracted absence, or tell him often enough how she has wearied for a sight of his face. And yet, he thinks to himself, with a sort of semi-bitterness, "Can anyone so blooming have wearied much really?"

His Betty was a pale, shut bud, this Betty is an expanded flower, that has opened its petals wide to the sun of happiness—that sun which he had never been able to make shine upon her. But, in time, honestly struggled against, this bitterness goes.

His daughter's unfeigned delight in his company, the ruthless way in which she makes everyone's convenience—even adored husband's and worshipped baby's — curtesy to his, could not fail to soothe a self-love more susceptible than Mr. Brewster's. His visit prolongs itself from days to weeks, from weeks to months. His daughter is always pressing upon him her loving importunities that he should live with them. "Why should you *ever* go?" she asks, for the hundredth time, on the evening preceding the day he has at length finally fixed upon for his departure. "Jack says he does not know what he shall do without you."

"Perhaps time and the consolations of religion may reconcile him to the blow," replies Mr. Brewster, with a little mild satire.

"He says he cannot account for

my not being nicer than I am, having such a father," pursues Betty, wheedlingly ; "come, you have not answered me ; why should not you stay with us alway ?"

"I must not make myself too common, Betty," says he, jestingly ; "if I lived with you, you could not make such a fuss with me as you have been doing for the last three months. I like to be made a fuss with."

And this is all the answer she gets out of him, and so she has to let him go, but not without plenteous tears and strenuous adjurations to return, before the month is out, for good. He has now been gone a week. For the first day or two after losing him, his daughter's spirits drooped extremely ; but before long, her youth, the happy conditions of her life, her husband's good humour,

and the baby's allurements restore her equanimity. It is an August evening, hot and fair, and Betty has stepped out of the dining-room window, according to her wont on such evenings, to bid the sleepy flowers good night, and hail the moon, the great, red, harvest moon wheeling up above the beech-wood, and waited on by her silver handmaid, stars. Mr. Carrington remains at the dining-table, sipping his claret, and looking out contentedly at the flitting white figure that now and then stops to throw in an affectionate glance at him, and an enthusiastic ejaculation as to ~~the~~ the loveliness of the night, to which latter he responds with all a Briton's unexpansive brevity. For a moment or two the figure has disappeared—gone, no doubt, to visit its Night Stocks, and Mr. Carrington has fallen into a placid reverie on beeves and farming implements, when

he is startled by the sound of a sharp cry from the direction of the garden. To jump up and fly through the window is with him the work of a moment. He has, after all, not far to go. At a hundred paces from him on the terrace, he sees his wife standing, and, as he nears her, perceives that she is gazing before her in a blank, unseeing way. Surprised and frightened, he takes her by the arm, crying "What is it?"

"Father is dead," she says, in a voice of acute agony; not as if answering him, nor even being aware of his presence. "I know it; he touched me on the head as he went by."

"Betty," cries the young man, puzzled and frightened, "what is the matter? What are you talking about?"

He knows nothing of her visions. It is not a subject, which, since her

father's last appeal to her for explanation, on the occasion of her mother's death, has been mentioned between him and her. Much less has any breath of them ever reached an outsider. She does not answer. She only gazes stonily straight before her in the moonlight. A cold terror seizes on Carrington. Has she gone mad? In an instant the thought has flashed through his mind. Is there madness in her family? Can he ever formerly have heard a whisper of, and forgotten it? If not, is this the beginning of some frightful illness, some hideous catalepsy? He catches her hand. It is cold and rigid.

"Betty! Betty! why do you frighten me so? What is it? For God's sake, speak!"

But she turns away from him, and begins to walk dumbly towards the house. He overtakes her, and now, thoroughly

alarmed, catches her in his arms, "Betty, what have I done to you? Will not you speak to me? You must speak."

Still she is silent, nor can any adjuration, however solemn, or entreaty, however tender, succeed in drawing one further word from her. Before he knows it she has slipped out of his arms and made her way indoors. Mr. Carrington passes a dreadful night, entirely sleepless, and crowded with hideous fears. Before his eyes, whether shut or open, the spectre madness does not cease to dance. On what other hypothesis can he explain his wife's sudden seizure? Is it the first of the kind, or has she previously been subject to such? This is one of the problems that torment him, and that he has no means of solving. There is no old nurse or other faithful family servant, whom he

can consult upon the point. His wife's maid came to her only at her marriage. He has not had the heart to go to bed, but has seen from his dressing-room window, with the tired eyes of one that has all night watched the stars go out, and the new day that in August still comes early, unfolding one after another, and putting on its many-coloured robes of splendour. Will this new day solve his riddle for him? His head aches, and his eyeballs burn. Perhaps the morning wind may make him feel less stupefied. Having listened at Betty's door and heard no sound — perhaps she may be in a wholesome sleep, from which she may wake cured and sane—he goes downstairs and out of doors. As he is walking towards the stable, drawing in long breaths of the exquisite summer air, he sees a

telegraph boy approaching him. "For me?" he asks, indifferently, as the messenger holds out his missive to him, and so absently opens it, his thoughts full of his own trouble — so full that for the first moment they do not grasp the meaning of the words presented to his eye: "Mr. Brewster seized with apoplexy last night at nine o'clock; dead in ten minutes; come or send directions." For a moment, he reels as if he were drunk, Betty's words rushing back in ghastly letters of fire before his mind's eye. She knew it at the very time it had happened! Great God! *how* did she know it?

HER FIFTH AND LAST VISION.

It is no great wonder that after such a shock Betty falls dangerously ill. For weeks she lies between life and death, and months elapse before she is restored to her former strength. Her husband nurses her with devoted and untiring tenderness ; sits by her through long night after long night, listening to her wanderings—(for she is often delirious)—wanderings about the long - departed playfellow of her childhood, Rachel ; about dear, dead dogs and birds ; about her sick mother ; nay, most of all, about her father too. And yet, listen as closely as he may, not once does he catch any least word as to the mysterious

seizure and the unexplained fore-warning which had preceded that father's death. Not even in highest delirium, when the bonds of reason are loosened, and the thoughts and feelings deepest buried, come to the surface, does she make any most distant allusion to it. It must be gone from her mind as completely as if it had never found a resting-place there. After a long time she creeps slowly back to convalescence, an uncertain, precarious convalescence, at first, but which gradually gains in solidity and dependableness as the languid days go by. Days passed, in lying for the most part, silent and pale in her great arm chair, pressing occasionally her husband's hand, as he sits fondly at her feet, or stroking his hair, and occasionally breaking into faint smiles at the antics of the baby, who has taken the opportunity

of her mother's illness to double herself in size, and has adopted a mode of progressing along the floor from chair leg to chair leg, which Betty, not having much acquaintance with other babies, thinks original, and admires with proportionate ecstasy. After a while, the hand that had feebly patted Carrington's head rests on his arm, as he leads her, warmly wrapped up, to the nearest of her garden haunts. The first day she does not get further than the terrace. The last time that she had visited it, was the evening on which he had found her cold and struck in the moonlight. His memory is full of this circumstance, as he leads her slowly along; but it seems to have no place in hers. Perhaps it is the entirely changed aspect of the scene, from summer moonlight to winter sunshine that keeps

recollection at bay. She makes little, interested comments upon the rimy grass, the frost-bound flower borders, upon the removal of some remembered shrub, but no ripple seems to stir the waters of any deeper memory.

Seeing her so insensible, he cannot resist experimentalising upon her, so far as to pause at the exact spot upon which, on that fatal night, he had found her standing. But she only looks up at him, smiling out of her furs, her thin face a little tinted by the sharp wind, and asks,

"What are you stopping for? You need not think that I am tired yet." He looks earnestly into her eyes, but they are obviously entirely unconscious, as is the brain behind them, of the remembrances of which his are full. It is clear that he must defer any probing of memory until she is

fully restored to health. And when at length—it is indeed at length—this comes to pass, his mind has taken such a habit of anxiety for his fragile treasure, that he shrinks from imperilling the hardly-won good by presenting to her mind any images but those that are smiling and cheerful. From day to day he defers the putting of that question which is so often at the end of his tongue, and so it comes to pass that it is never asked at all. Time, as he goes by, brings many good things to the Caringtons, and so far—and now the baby is three years old—no bad ones. If there are any drawbacks to the fact of possessing an only child, even they will shortly be removed, for Betty hopes, ere long, to embrace a son. She is looking forward with strong longings, and without any fear, to the expected blessing.

No dreams or visions, or eerie warnings of any kind have disturbed her placid prosperity. The season is as prosperous as she, and now, in late June, the farmers are garnering their heavy hay crops without a drop of rain, and life is one long fragrant feast with the strawberry beds for board. Mr. Carrington has set off upon a long day's trout fishing — an elastic sort of little excursion, which may end to-night, may be prolonged till to-morrow.

“Do not hurry back,” says Betty, bidding her husband good bye; “enjoy yourself, old man! I am only afraid” — glancing from the absolutely unclouded sky to the rather parched grass — “that you will find the river a little low.” And so, in the early morning, she waves him a smiling farewell, leaning in her cool white gown against the porch, and crying

cheerfully, "Bring me home plenty of trout!"

The day turns out a very hot one, but what matter to one who can sit under a great beech's shade all day, with a cabbage leaf full of strawberries beside her, and engaged in no severer exertion than to watch little Betty tumbling in the hay, and occasionally set her dislocated hat straight again upon her yellow curls. There seems a slight want of imagination in having christened the child Betty, too, and so the elder Betty pointed out to her husband.

"Will not it make a great confusion having two Bettys?" she asks. But he, in all the hot and foolish ardour of young husbandhood, asseverates that there cannot be too much of a good thing; there cannot be too many Bettys. She lifts her eyebrows with a languid smile.

“Then if we have six daughters they will all be Bettys!” But this extravagant supposition he refuses to face. And now little Betty’s bed-time has come. It is hard work to tear her away, kicking and screaming, from the sympathetic haymakers. It is hard work to get her into her bath, and it is harder still to get her out again. Far and wide the water splashes, and the soap-suds fly under the excited plunges of her fat legs. The delights of the day have almost turned her little brain. Laughing, crying, wildly hilarious; finally, very tired and outrageously cross, she is at length laid in bed, and almost before her naughty gold head has touched the pillow, is asleep.

“Fast as a rock,” says the nurse, bending admiringly over her. So fast that neither nurse nor mother need lower their voices as they discuss

with the grave interest that befits so momentous a theme, what frock little Betty is to wear at a strawberry-eating and haymaking party in the neighbourhood to which she is to be taken on the morrow.

"Of course, she looks best in white," says the nurse, thoughtfully reviewing the little garments spread out for inspection; "it shows up her skin best. I never saw such a skin, if you will believe me, ma'am. I really cannot tell sometimes where the child's frock ends and her neck begins."

"She is as fair as a lily," asserts the mother, proudly.

"She has got shockingly tanned to-day," pursues the nurse, regretfully. "I could not get her to keep her hat on. As fast as I put it on she tore it off again. She was like a mad thing, and I did want her to look her best to-morrow."

“But she will,” rejoins the mother, fondly. “She is a most satisfactory child; she always looks her best when one wants her. Bring out some more of her frocks. I do not quite like any of these.”

The nurse complies, and walking to a high press, sacred to little Betty's voluminous wardrobe, begins to pull out drawers and choose the daintiest of the many little changes of raiment lying there in lavender. Her mistress does not interrupt her by any comment or suggestion. When her selection is at length made, the nurse returns towards her mistress with a heap of little clothes thrown over her arm. She is so occupied in turning them over, that she does not look up until she is quite close to Mrs. Carrington, when, lifting her eyes, she becomes aware that the latter, with an ash-white face and a terrible

blank look, is putting up both her hands, as if keeping off from herself something unspeakably feared and terrible.

"I must die to-morrow!" she says, in a voice so changed, so full of awe and horror, as to be almost unrecognisable. "I know. *It* touched me on the heart as it went by."

"Good God, ma'am, what is the matter? What ails you? *What* touched you?" shrieks the nurse, beside herself with vague fear.

But her mistress makes no answer, and only falls from her chair on the floor in a dead, dead swoon.

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The river has not been so low as Mr. Carrington feared, the sky too, has clouded over opportunely, and he has had better sport than he hoped for. He has fished on and on and on; down and down the river, until it

was too late to return home that night; so he puts up at a little, riverside ale-house, well known to him of old; dines hungrily on some of his own trout, and, sleeping sweetly, dreams of May flies and Ginger hackles. All next day he fishes again; and it is not till evening that he at length sees his own house rise before him against the rose-red sunset. He has walked from the station. Since he had not sent word at what hour he was to be expected, no vehicle awaits him. But the distance is short, and he enjoys the walk, with the prospect of Betty's smile and some more trout at the end of it. "How early they have shut up the house," he says to himself as he comes within sight of the building, and becomes aware that all the blinds are drawn down. "What is the meaning of that, I wonder?"

A little puzzled, but not alarmed, he walks in, and, entering the house by the garden door, looks into his wife's boudoir. She is not there. Into the drawing-room, she is not there; the library, not there; the smoking-room, not there. He passes out upon the terrace and calls "Betty, Betty," but there is no answer. "Pooh! how stupid; of course she has gone up to dress for dinner." He runs lightly upstairs and turns the handle of his wife's bed-room door. It is locked. What does this mean? He calls "Betty, Betty, open the door." But she does not answer. The idea strikes him that he can enter by his dressing - room. Yes, it's door is not locked. In one moment he has passed through it and is in the bed-room. Why are his legs beginning to shake under him? The light is dim, the blinds pulled down to the bottom, and

no candles lit. Betty cannot be here ; surely she is not here. Involuntarily his eye falls on the bed. *What is this ?* There is a great white sheet drawn over it, and beneath that sheet an outline. In a second (how he gets there he never knows) he is at the bedside, the sheet is turned down, and he has learned what lies beneath it. His Betty dead and rigid, with a dead baby beside her ! For *it*, whatever the mysterious messenger was, has kept its word.

FINIS.

MRS. SMITH OF LONGMAINS.

SCENE I.

IT was a bitter January morning, a morning that obviously was not going to mend into a tolerable day, but had every intention of increasing into an intolerable one. The state of the weather was, perhaps, enough to account for that of my appearance, as to the unfavourable condition of which, the chorus of comments from three over-truthful daughters could not and did not leave in doubt for a moment after my entering the breakfast room.

"How wretched you look!" said Alice, the eldest.

"You are in for one of your bad colds," said Ruth, the second.

"You have been writing upstairs in a room without a fire, as we forbid you to do," said Susan, the youngest and most tyrannous.

I made no sort of answer to these compliments, but walking up to the fire stood holding my hands to the blaze.

"Do not play us the same trick that you did last year," said Alice, setting a chair close to the fender for me, "and fall ill on the eve of the bachelors' ball!"

"No," added Ruth, laughing; "we bore it once in a way, but we draw the line at a second time!"

"You would not palm us off again upon Lady Brown, would you?" asked Susan, coaxingly, kneeling down on

the rug beside me, and beginning to rub one of my cold hands between her two warm ones. "You would not entrust your little ones to an old monster who eats supper until she cannot see, and then snatches them away just as the real fun is beginning."

"It is very odd," said I, with a somewhat sarcastic crossness; "how solicitous you girls always grow about my health at this time of year. I might be moribund all through Lent without any of you perceiving it."

"I think we are very kind to you all the year round," returned Sue, giving my hand, which she still chafed in her own, a rather rebuking pat. "It is very carping of you to notice it if we are a little more attentive one month than another."

"Well, don't be nervous," said I, trying to laugh. "When the day

comes, you will not find me absent from my bench of torment." But at that they all burst upon me in full cry. "Your bench of torment! Well, I do call that hypocrisy, mammy! We always say that nobody enjoys a ball so much as you; it is invariably we that have to drag you away, not you us."

I had not spirits to disclaim.

"If I were you," said Alice authoritatively; "I should just go straight back to bed and have some salvolatile and water."

"Or some white wine-whey," suggested Ruth.

"Yes, do," said Susan, "and I will come and read you to sleep. You always say that my reading puts you to sleep faster than anyone's."

"That is a left-handed compliment, Sue," said Alice, laughing.

"I know it is," replied Sue, com-

posedly, "but she does say so, don't you, mammy?"

"Will not you come now — at once?" asked Alice, taking my other hand. "It would be far the wisest plan if you could get into a good perspiration——"

But at that I found voice to interrupt her, rising suddenly from my chair, and flinging away the caresses of my too officious children.

"I do not know what you would be at," said I, indignantly. "*Quelle mouche vous pique?* What possesses you all with the idea that I am ill. Have I made any complaint? though indeed, to have six gimlet eyes fastened upon your face, and three croaking voices in your ears, is enough to make you ill if anything is. For heaven's sake disabuse your mind of this extraordinary fancy, and let us come to breakfast!"

There was such unmistakeable exasperation in my tone, that my children saw I was not to be trifled with, so, acquiescing in my proposition, they and I sat down to breakfast. But I caught them several times casting surreptitious glances at me to see whether I ate as usual, and whether or not I shivered aguishly in the chill with which they were so determined to credit me. To baulk them, I dodged behind the tea kettle, and tried to eat more heartily than my wont, in which, however, I was not very successful. Conversation was slack, which, to do us justice, it was not apt to be at our breakfast-table. Its present flagging condition was attributable, I imagine, partly to my supposed ill-health (my appearance must have been very much more deplorable than I had had any idea of), partly and chiefly to the absence

of the master, always, when at home, the originator or fosterer of every joke, and who last night set off for Ireland, in which country he, for the punishment of his sins, possessed some landed estates.

“Poor daddy!” said Alice, looking towards his vacant place. “He must have had a cold crossing last night. I woke at four this morning, when he must have been just halfway over, and thought, ‘Poor daddy! rather you than I.’”

“I dreamed of him,” said Ruth—“such an absurd dream. I dreamed we were giving a large party on the sly in his absence, and that he came back unexpectedly in the middle of it, like Sir Thomas Bertram in ‘Mansfield Park,’ and that we were all in such a fright. I woke just as I was trying to hide one of my partners between the legs of

the billiard-room table—such a likely place to escape detection!”

They all laughed.

“And I,” said Sue, “slept so soundly that I never once thought or dreamt of him at all—rather brutal of me!”

“It is fortunate that one is not answerable for one’s dream-self,” said Ruth, recurring to the thought of her own dream; “one is sometimes such a rogue and sometimes such a booby in one’s dreams.”

“And you, mammy?” said Sue, amiably trying to draw me into the conversation, from which, since the beginning of breakfast, I had almost entirely excluded myself, “what sort of a night had you? The drunkard’s heavy slumbers” (laughing) “like mine? Or pleasant and probable visions like Ruth’s? Which?”

But I was prevented from re-

plying to this question by the entrance of the butler, who came in to ask whether there were any orders for the coachman.

"Surely not," said Alice," answering for me. "We shall be skating all the day, and you—you will not be so insane as to stir from the fireside!"

I have always disliked being answered for. I have always known perfectly what my own opinions and wishes were, and have been fully able to express them. My eldest daughter's growing tendency to reply for me had already on several previous occasions fidgetted me. After a moment's hesitation, I turned to the butler saying, "There are no orders for him this morning; if there are any for the afternoon I will let the coachman know at luncheon time."

Having thus established my authority

I rose and left the room rather disagreeably conscious that the girls were whispering behind me. However, I suppose they saw that I was not in a humour to be trifled with, and wisely forbore from offering me any more of their extremely ill-received advice. By and bye I saw them all three setting gleefully off with their skates over their arms to the frozen mere, of which I could catch a glimpse — stiff among its stiffened sedges—between the brown limbs of the January trees. I watched them till their light figures, their tailor gowns and tight jackets, were quite out of sight, and then returned to the oak drawing-room in which I always spent my mornings.

Here I at once found traces of that solicitous care for me on the part of my girls, which my ferocity had hindered them from expressing

in words. My favourite chair was drawn close up to the hearth ; every chink of window carefully closed—usually we were a madly open-air family. On a little table at my elbow stood a bottle of salvolatile, one of camphor, a small jug of hot water, and several lumps of sugar. I rang at once and had them all taken away. Then I sat down by the fire, and sat staring into it for the best part of an hour in entire idleness.

I was not apt to be such a drone. Occupation I had always in plenty. What mother of a family and mistress of a house has not? And, to do myself justice, I had ordinarily no inclination to slight my duties. But, on this particular morning, I neither turned nor attempted to turn my hand to any one thing. I sat over the fire ; not even shivering or sneezing (for my children were on a wrong scent

when they made up their obstinate young minds that I was threatened with influenza), occasionally conscious that I was muttering to myself under my breath. At last, "this will really not do," said I, aloud; pushing back my chair from the fire. "I do not know what has come to me. I hope that I am not going off my head."

So saying, I put my hand to my forehead, in which there was a disagreeable pulse beating, and walked to the window. An ugly, grinding, black frost, long, iron-bound bare borders, through which it seemed impossible that crocuses could ever push their gracious golden heads; a sad robin, a chaffinch, and three sparrows, all hungry, and naturally silent, seeking on the gravel walk the poor remains of the crumbs thrown out at breakfast. There was nothing assuredly in the face of the

outer world to put me in better spirits. But none the less did I continue aimlessly to gape at it. "Shall I?" said I, under my breath; "anyone would say I was mad if I did, it would be the *ne plus ultra* of folly and irrationality; if the girls heard of it, and of my reason, they would think I was ripe for Bedlam; but—but it would be a relief! After all, I am mistress in my own house, why should not I? I will." I almost ran to the bell, and rang it sharply. But, in the interval between my having pulled it and the appearance of the servant who answered it, there was time for another change to come over my spirit.

"It is twelve miles if it is a step," said I, internally; "the days are dark at four; if I give way to these imaginings, I shall gradually become unfit for all the ordinary

duties of life: it may be an insidious form of hysteria."

The footman entered.

"Some coals, please," said I.

I resumed my place by the fire, and took up some knitting. Turning the heel of a stocking requires some attention. It might absorb mine. In vain. My heel, or rather Ruth's—I had rashly embarked upon hers—entirely failed to follow, even approximately, the outline of the human foot, and I dropped it back into the work-basket. I picked up a novel. Alice had described it as breathlessly interesting, and, indeed, had sat up late over night to finish it, unable to tear herself away from its pages. I could not chain my mind even so far as to make acquaintance with its characters. I laid it, too, down.

"I believe the girls are right," I

said. "I must be ill; this restlessness must be the forerunner of some serious sickness."

I walked uneasily out of the room into the adjoining one, which, as we never sat in it except of an evening, looked unfriendly and formal by daylight; then out into the hall, down a passage into the billiard-room. I had no motive for going there or anywhere else, only I could not keep still. As my eye fell on the billiard-table, I remembered Ruth's silly dream of having hid her admirer between its legs. What an absurd dream! All dreams are absurd! I strayed back into the hall, and again looked through the window. The drive stretched away before me, dark-coloured between the whitened winter grass. "It would take an hour and three-quarters, driving at a good pace," said I; "if I set off at two,

I should be there by a quarter-past three. I need not stay more than half-an-hour, and should be back here by half-past five. Pooh! In the country that is a mere nothing. I will decide to go."

A second time I pulled the bell; but a second time, before it was answered, half-a-dozen adverse reasons rushed into my mind and made me repent my resolution. The road, as far as I remembered it—for part of it I had travelled only once or twice in my life—was not a good one. The stables might be cold, and give the horses influenza, a pleasant piece of news with which to greet the master of the house on his return from Ireland. That last thought was conclusive. I would abandon the idea definitively. And meanwhile the footman had come in, and was looking expectantly at me. What could

I be supposed to have rung for?
My fancy supplied no suggestion.

"Never mind," said I, stupidly;
"it was a mistake; it was nothing."

At the same moment the back door opened, and in came the three girls, bringing a whiff of frost, and buxom health and jollity with them, and still—as I was not long in discovering—that baneful idea of my ill-health.

"Mammy, what are you thinking of? Out in the draught, away from the fire. Back, back, this instant!"

"Did you take the salvolatile?" asked the first, anxiously.

"Did you try the camphor?" inquired the second.

"Did you see that we had put the sugar handy for you?" asked the third.

"I saw all your kind remedies," replied I, drily, "and I had them all

at once removed. I see no reason why a perfectly healthy woman's drawing-room should be littered with physic bottles."

While I was speaking the gong sounded—for some reason, I forget what, we were lunching earlier than usual that day—at one. The girls scampered off to get ready. During our repast I do not think that I was much more loquacious than I had been at breakfast, but my children made up for my silence by the volume of their chatter. Once or twice they asked me why I was looking out of the window, and what I expected to see there? In point of fact, I was repenting of my repentance, but I need not say that I did not tell them so. Towards the middle of luncheon the butler again enquired, "whether there were any orders for the coachman?"

"Surely not," said Alice, answering for me, "the roads are like looking glass, and it is beginning to snow even if you were well."

"Tell the coachman," said I interrupting her with some tartness "that I will have the brougham at *two*."

There was a moment of silent consternation among my little flock

"Then, if it is only into Leighton that you want to go for any shopping," said Ruth, in a conciliatory voice, "could not you let us do it for you?"

"I am not going into Leighton," replied I, shortly.

Another moment's silence.

"Come, now, where are you going?" cried Sue, getting up, coming over to, and kneeling down beside me, in order to try, as I knew, what personal wheedling — usually a very

effective weapon in her hands—could do with me.

“Why are you so mysterious?”

“I am not aware,” replied I, pompously, “that I am answerable to my children for my goings out and comings in,” then, sinking into a less majestic tone, “I have no objection to telling you where I am going.” This was not quite true.

“I am going to call on Mrs. Smith.”

“Mrs. Smith!”

“Mrs. *Smith*!”

“*What* Mrs. Smith?”

In three different keys of disapproving astonishment.

“Mrs. Smith of Longmains.”

“Why, you do not know her.”

“Why, it is twelve miles off.”

“Why, daddy and Mr. Smith are not on speaking terms.”

“I beg your pardon,” replied I, gaining in firmness as I perceived

the weight of opposition brought to bear upon me, "I *do* know Mrs. Smith. I have no dislike to a long drive, and if the men of two families come to loggerheads, it is the more reason why the women should try to keep the peace."

The girls gaped at me.

"But why to-day, in Heaven's name?"

"Why *not* to-day?"

It seemed as if the butler had taken upon himself to answer my question, for he had again entered the room and was speaking.

"If you please, the coachman is very sorry, but the roads are like *hice*, and he has not had the horses roughed."

I hesitated.

"That settles the question," cries my eldest girl, triumphantly.

"Does it?" said I, tonic'd back

into instantaneous decision. "Let him send for the blacksmith at once to rough the carriage horses as quickly as he can. I must have the brougham as soon as it can be got ready, whatever the weather."

Servants never look surprised, and the girls were too angry with me, and I suppose thought me too great a fool to be worth spending any more breath upon, so I had no further remonstrances from them to battle with.

It was past three o'clock, instead of two, before I started, but I did set off at last. I got my way!

SCENE II.

I got my way, always a pleasant thing to do. But I think in this case the pleasantness inseparable from making one's will override the wills of other people was reduced as low as it well could be. I was setting off on a raw winter afternoon, with a rising wind, falling barometer, and thickening snow, upon a twelve miles' drive along a rutty road, to visit a woman whom—despite the stoutness of my assertions to the contrary to my children—I scarcely knew; against whose husband mine had a rooted prejudice, and for bringing her into more intimate relations with whom I was well aware that he would be less than moderately grateful to me.

Why, then, was I doing it? This is the question that I am about to answer; and when it is answered, you will probably think me an even greater fool than did my girls, who were ignorant that I had any reasons beyond native pigheadedness.

It would be putting the amount of thought that I was apt to devote to Mrs. Smith far too high to say that I thought of her once a year. She had certainly never crossed my mind on the previous day. Why, then, was it that no sooner was I asleep last night than I was with her? It would have seemed natural that I, who, during all my waking hours, had been occupied with my husband, his plans, his departure, his absence, his return, should, if I dreamed at all, have dreamed of him. He never once crossed my brain. I had other absorbing subjects of

interest ; an attachment of Sue's, that I disapproved of, and over which I worried head and heart through many an anxious hour ; a budding taste for play in my eldest boy ; debts of his to be hidden from his father ; a wearing fear lest my excellent younger son should break down under the strain of his examination for the Indian Civil Service.

Yes, I had a choice of nightmares in my stable, a row of skeletons in my closet, any one of which would, one might think, have furnished the stuff for my sleeping thoughts as they did unceasingly for my waking ones. Not at all ! I passed them all by, to dream wholly, connectedly, and with an astonishing vividness, of Mrs. Smith.

I was with her in a room—a room I had never, to my knowledge, been in before ; presumably at Longmains,

whose doors I had never entered. It was a room simply. No feature of it impressed itself with any distinctness on my memory, as I have heard has often been the case in other vivid dreams. On reflection, I was not sure that I should know it again. Of one only fact in connection with it was I quite certain, and that was—that as we sat together at the fire, the door, the only door the room possessed, was on our left hand.

We were sitting, as I say, together by the fire. There was a clock on the mantel-piece, what kind of clock it was was dim to me; but there was a clock, for I remembered hearing it tick. Mrs. Smith was sitting opposite to me, her back towards the door, facing which I was. I could see her features as plainly as I had done

Sue's when she knelt beside me at luncheon, asking why I was so mysterious. I could not have believed that I knew Mrs. Smith's face so well; her unimportant nose, her slightly indicated eyes, lustreless hair, and characterless figure. But out of some lumber-room of memory they must have started, conjured up by the strong spells of sleep. It was a perfectly connected, rational dream. I was I, and she was Mrs. Smith. She was not half Mrs. Smith and half somebody else. She did not suddenly, and without exciting any surprise in my mind—so eccentric are the laws of dreamland—become metamorphosed into another person. She was, and continued to be, Mrs. Smith of Longmains.

The one thing that clashed with probability was the fact of my being sitting *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Smith in

any room late at night, for somehow I knew that it *was* late at night. I do not remember looking at the clock, but I was by some means aware that such was the case. We were both working, and one of us had said something about its being twelve o'clock. This was followed by Mrs. Smith making an observation which I had forgotten. I was sure that I had heard it perfectly at the time, for immediately on waking I had re-called it, but afterwards it had escaped me, and make what efforts I might, I was unable to recapture it. After all, it was of no great consequence whether I remembered it or not.

What I did remember with a startling distinctness was, that no sooner had she ceased speaking than there came a knock at the door. I remember thinking that it was an

odd time of the night for anyone to knock at the door, but Mrs. Smith showed no surprise. She said, phlegmatically, "Come in ;" and the door opened at once and in walked the butler. For some strange dream-reason I could not see his face. It was all mist and blur to me. On waking, I felt sure that I should not be able to recognise him again. I was only conscious that he was a young man. He had a coal-box in his hand, and the next thing of which I was aware about him was that he was kneeling at the hearth making up the fire. Again it struck me that it was an odd time to choose to make up the fire. I had, as I tell you, for some reasonless reason, not seen his face, though it must have been turned towards me as he entered the room, but as he knelt at the fire I saw his back.

saw it so clearly that I felt that, stooping in the same attitude over the flame, I should recognise it among ten thousand. I saw it far more distinctly than, as I drove along, I saw the frozen pastures and the shivering sheep.

Mrs. Smith had risen from her chair, and walked to the other side of the small room where she stood doing something—I did not know what—at a piece of furniture with drawers in it. I was not looking at her but at the man, and suddenly I found myself wondering what that was that I saw sticking up dimly visible out of his coat-tail pocket. As I wondered, I became aware that he was stealthily rising to his feet, and that his hand was cautiously travelling to his pocket in search of that very object which had arrested my attention. In another second, he

had drawn it out—it was a revolver; had cocked it, aimed it at his mistress's head and fired!

There was a thud, a horrible thud that I heard plainly even now as I drove along in my safe brougham, and I woke screaming so loudly that if anyone had been occupying a room near mine, they must have been awoken by the sound; but as it happened, nobody was. The girls were separated from me by a long passage, and the servants were in an entirely different region.

The dream had been so much more real than reality, that it must have been some minutes—it seemed to be hours—before my reason could assert itself enough to tell me which was which. I do not know how long it was before I at length summoned up resolution to strike a light, and, shaking with terror, so that I could

nardly hold the candle to get out of bed and examine the room for some indication of what could have been the cause of that dread, dull noise, which I could by no possibility believe to have existed only in my imagination. I searched in vain. The windows were all securely fastened; the door bolted, as I had left it over night. The pictures hung on the walls; there was no brick fallen from the chimney on the hearth; not even a handful of soot or a starling's nest. Nothing, nothing anywhere.

I crept back to bed, still quivering in every nerve. I must make up my mind that the whole thing had been the work of my own fancy, preternaturally alive in sleep. Good Heavens! Could the power of any imagination be adequate to presenting to me with the astounding

vividness mine had done the figure of that man, kneeling with his back to me by the fire and stealing a covert hand to that coat pocket. I shut my eyes. Still I saw him, and with such distinctness, I felt that if I put out my hand I must touch him. I lit another candle, the more light the better. Still I saw him. I hid my head under the clothes. Still I saw him. The cold sweat stood on my forehead. I lay in an agony till daybreak ; and, when the reassuring light began to creep in, I became a little more able to summon to my aid such reason as I was master of, to correct the hitherto overwhelming influence of that grisly vision.

Several circumstances of improbability in the dream presented themselves with some reassurance to my mind. The murderer, as seen by me, had been a young man. Now, I

happened accidentally to have learnt only lately that the Smiths possessed as butler an old family servant, who had lived with them over thirty years, and whom they were most unlikely to have parted with. Also, throughout the dream, I was conscious that but for servants, Mrs. Smith and I were alone in the house. Now, only yesterday, one of the girls had casually mentioned meeting Mr. Smith in Leighton. As the light broadened I dwelt with more and more confidence on these discrepancies, and was able to go down to breakfast presenting such a distant resemblance to my usual self as I have described.

But when left to myself after breakfast, with nothing to distract my thoughts and no appearances of equanimity to keep up, the vision returned upon me with almost its first force.

Again I saw that kneeling figure, that stealthy rising, that travelling of the hand to the coat pocket. I heard the click of that cocked revolver! I could not bear it. It *must* mean something! I *must* go to her. Must warn her. As you know, I rang the bell to order the carriage. But in the interval before it was answered, the vision passed; reason, or what I supposed to be reason, re-asserted its sway, telling me how shadowy was the pretext upon which I was going to intrude upon this stranger; and how little my husband would thank me.

This same thing was repeated more than once; it was only Alice's triumphant "That settles it!" which gave me the final impetus that enabled me to decide which of the two courses to adopt. Though, indeed, I thought I must have gone

in any case. I *could* not get that man's kneeling back from before my eyes. I *could* not have faced another night alone in the dark with it.

So now, reader, you know my reason for setting off at past three o'clock on a January afternoon, upon a twelve mile drive along a rutty road, with rising wind and thickening snow, to visit an almost entire stranger, whom my husband did not wish me to hold any communication with. Probably you think me as great a fool as the girls would have done. I was too much occupied with my own thoughts to notice the weather or the landscape much. I was worried with the stupid effort (which yet I could not help making) to recall that remark of Mrs. Smith's which had immediately preceded the knock at the door in my dream. In vain; no glimmering of it would recur to me.

I was still cudgelling on my restive memory for it, when my attention was awakened by the carriage stopping and the footman appearing at the window.

"If you please, the coachman is afraid he is not sure which of these roads he ought to take."

I put my head out. We were at three cross roads.

"Why, there is a sign post!" said I, tartly. "Why do not you look at it?"

"If you please, the names are all rubbed out."

Here the coachman leaned from his box to join in the conversation.

"The snow is coming on very thick, ma'am; I doubt our getting to Longmains to-night."

"At all events we will try," replied I, with decision. "Go slowly along whichever road you think looks most likely, until you pass a cottage, or some inn at which you can ask."

I was obeyed. We moved slowly in a dismal uncertainty for some way; in the waning light the figures of the two men, with their whitened hats and great-coats, grew indistinct. Then we stopped again. Praise Heaven, we had met someone! I let down the glass to look and listen. Yes, there was a whitened countryman standing in the snow, being questioned. He was deaf, apparently; and it was some time before he could be got to understand the drift of the interrogatory addressed to him.

When at length he did, I gathered from his words and gestures, as well as the wind would let me, the reassuring information that we had come wrong. And, as ill-luck would have it, the road had narrowed so much that we had to go on for some distance before finding a place wide enough to enable us to turn.

So that it must have been fully half-an-hour from the time of our first passing it, before we found ourselves once again at the finger-post : that blind leader of the blind. The dark had fully fallen before we found ourselves rolling noiselessly as snow could make us, over the cobble-stoned streets of a little country town.

"This must be Salcote," said I to myself, "I know that Salcote is their town. Courage! We can't be very far off now."

Let no one holloa before they are out of the wood!

This thought had scarcely passed through my mind before I was conscious of a jolt, severer than any that the snow-wrapped pavement of Salcote could inflict; the carriage gave a sort of dip on one side; in an instant the horses were pulled up on their haunches; the footman

off the box and holding the carriage door open.

"If you please, ma'am, you will have to get out, one of the wheels has come off."

I did not need a second bidding. In an instant I was out, standing in the snow, and peering with the help of Salcote's dim street gas at one of the hind wheels, in order to verify my servant's words. They were but too true. It had come off. Fortunately, in so doing, it had fallen, inwards, instead of outwards, in which latter case the carriage must, of course, have been overturned. I stared stupidly at it. Was this a judgment on me for my pigheadedness? What was to be done?

"Which is the best inn in the town?" asked I, addressing generally a group of gapers, which, snowball-like, had gathered round me and my

broken wheel. Half-a-dozen voices instantly cried "White Hart" — as many dirty fingers pointed up the street, to where, about a hundred yards off, I could faintly see an old-fashioned sign hanging out.

"I suppose," said I, disconsolately to the coachman, who was already beginning to unfasten the traces, "that you will have to stay here for the night, I must go home in a fly."

As I spoke, I set off to walk to the White Hart, which I reached in about two minutes.

"My carriage has broken down," said I as I entered, addressing the civil woman—landlady, I suppose—who came to meet me. "I want a fly at once, please, as soon as it can be got ready. Have you one in; a good fly? I want a good fly at once, please," repeating the words with an emphasis which I though

must impress them upon my hearer. She assured me that she had, though, from the length of time that had elapsed before it appeared, I have since felt ~~certain~~ ~~that~~ she had not spoken the truth, but had to wait in hope of the return of some vehicle now conveying another fare, and of some poor tired horse, destined through me to be baulked of his hard-earned feed.

And as I sat waiting in the little inn parlour, my thoughts were not of the most complacent. Perhaps I had had enough of having my own will now! After all, I had better henceforth submit tamely to Alice's rule. I was clearly not fit to rule myself. Into what a stupid quandary had I brought myself, guided only by the Will-o'-th'-Wisp of a senseless dream. Well, the only rational course now left me to adopt was to return home

as quickly as possible, acknowledge my folly, submit, with what good humour I could muster, to the just laughter that folly would provoke, and resolve never to make such a fool of myself again. As I so resolved, a girl entered to poke the fire, and asked if I would like to take anything. I refused, and inquired how far they called it to Longmains.

“To Longmains, ma am? About three miles, ma'am; not quite three miles, but it is not a good road.”

She left the room again. Only three miles! To have come so near, and then turn back! Should I not turn back? Should I go on? As I hesitated, again I saw that kneeling figure stealthily rising, with its backward travelling hand. I looked round with a shiver. I wished the girl would come in again; I wished that I was not alone in the room. I shut

my eyes, and still before them was that kneeling figure.

I must go on! I *would* go on! At the same moment the landlady entered to tell me that a fly was at the door, and I followed her out. There it stood, with the horse's head—it was a dispirited, disappointed head, poor beast—turned towards my own home, and the footman holding the door open. I got in.

“Home, ma'am?” asked he, touching his hat, and evidently in no doubt as to the answer.

“No,” said I, desperately; “to Longmains.”

For an instant he looked staggered, as if doubting his own ears, then prepared to get on the box.

“Stay,” said I, “you must not come with me; you must find your own way home and tell the young ladies not to be alarmed however

late it may be before I return. And tell him to go on and drive as quick as he can."

I was off; we clattered with a spurious briskness until we had left behind us the streets of the little town. Then we dropped into a tired crawl in which we continued. The horse was evidently all but done. Ah! but for me, he might have had his poor nose in his manger!

They certainly had not erred on the side of exaggeration who had told me that the road was not a good one. It was abominable. I was tossed up in the air and caught again a hundred times, like a cup and ball, by the monstrous ruts; the fly smelt rampantly of straw, and fust, and worm-eaten cloth; the piercing winds blew through it. If anyone in after time ever asked me what was the distance between Salcote and Long-

mains, I always answered thirty miles. And I really believed it.

At last, however, we stopped at a gate, the driver got down, there was no lodge, and after interminable fumbling he opened it, and we passed through. There were three more gates, at all of which he fumbled, so that when at last we drew up at a hall door I had the pleasure of hearing the hour of six told distinctly by several clocks within and without the house.

What an hour at which to call, with a twelve miles drive home afterwards! If a white-headed seneschal—obviously the confidential family servant of whom I had heard—appeared in answer to my ring, I would thrust in my card, and return whence I came, without asking to be admitted. I waited breathlessly. It was some time before anyone appeared.

Who, indeed, would be expected to arrive at such an hour? At length there was a sound of steps, and of a turning handle. The door opened, and in the aperture appeared a man. Was he an old or a young one? I craned my head out feverishly to ascertain. Young, obviously young. But perhaps he was a footman. Again I stared feverishly out. No, he was not in livery. He was a butler and he was *a young man*.

SCENE III

MRS. Smith's was not a face upon which I imagine as a rule any emotion painted itself with much vividness. It was a dull, flat, mask-like face; but there was one feeling that upon my entry it showed itself at all events fully capable of portraying, and that was *astonishment*. I shall never forget the way in which her eyes and mouth opened as I sheepishly followed my own name into her drawing-room. She rose from a work-table at which she was sitting and advanced to meet me civilly enough, but all over her face was written such an obvious expectation of hearing from my lips some immediate explanation of this surprising

visit, that not all the shock of the discovery that, in its first particular—that of the changed butler—my dream was fulfilled, could prevent my feeling covered with confusion at my own apparent intrusiveness.

“I am afraid this is rather a late hour at which to call,” said I, constrainedly—she tried to put in a faint disclaimer—“but the fact is I met with an accident on my way. My carriage broke down in Salcote—something went wrong with the axletree.”

“Indeed! I am very sorry.” Perfectly politely, but still with that undisguisable look of astonishment and expected explanation. It must be remembered that she had been living twelve years in the neighbourhood, and that I had made no slightest attempt to visit her before.

“And so I had to wait till a fly could be got ready, which threw me later still,” continued I, boldly.

She again repeated. "Indeed!" and that she was very sorry, adding that the Salcote flies were very bad ones. But I saw the puzzled look grow acuter, and I could follow the chain of thought that was running through her mind as plainly as if it had been written on a piece of paper before me. That my carriage should have broken down, and that yet I should have been so determinedly resolved to visit her as to push on in the teeth of circumstances in a mouldy fly at six o'clock at night, and on such a night, was the problem, her total inability to solve which she was perfectly unable to disguise, nor could I help her.

It was utterly impossible that I could tell her what motive had brought me. Had she been another kind of woman I might possibly have confessed myself to her; but being such

as she was, I felt that I had sooner be torn in pieces by wild horses. As we were toilsomely trying to keep up a conversation, rendered almost impossible by our relative positions, the butler entered, bringing tea. As he set down the tray on the tea table I could not help stealing a sidelong glance at his face. It told me nothing. I had never, to my knowledge, seen it before, nor was it one that I should ever have noticed. But, then, neither had I seen the dream-face. It had been unaccountably hidden from me. As soon as he had left the room, I said abruptly,

“So you have lost your old butler.”

A fresh access of surprise overtook her, as I saw. How did I know that they had an old butler?

“Yes,” she answered, slowly; “we kept him as long as we could, poor old man, because we were so fond of

him, but he grew so infirm at last that he had to go."

"And your present one?"

"Our present one?" Repeating my words with a puzzled air.

"Yes ; do you like him? Had you a very good character with him?"

Her eyes opened wide at my extraordinary curiosity.

"Well, I am afraid that we were a little imprudent in his case. I am sure it is very good of you to take an interest in the matter." ("For good, read *impertinent*," commented I, internally.) "But the fact is, that there seems to be a little mystery about the reason why he left his last place. However, Mr. Smith took a fancy to his appearance, and so we engaged him. But I do not know" — formally — "why I should trouble you with our domestic affairs."

I did not answer for a moment.

I was thinking with a sort of stupefaction. They have taken him without a character! Who knows what his antecedents were? When I did speak it was with an apparently brusque change of subject. I myself knew the link that bound the two topics together in my mind.

"Mr. Smith is well, I hope; at home?"

"He was quite well when he left home this morning, thanks."

"Left home!" interrupted I, breathlessly; "he has left home?"

"He was summoned away unexpectedly," answered she, tranquilly; "but I expect him back to-morrow, or the day after, at latest."

"But not to-night?" hurriedly.

"No, not to-night, certainly," with her usual phlegm.

At that moment the butler again entered, bringing coals—apparently

Longmain's did not boast a footman—and knelt down before the fire to put them on.

For a moment my eye fell on him; then I turned suddenly sick. Surely that was the very back, the very kneeling figure altogether that I had seen in my dreams! I suppose I looked very odd, pale and faint; for I found Mrs. Smith's white eyes fixed upon me, and her voice asking me, "Did I feel the fire too much?" I stammered out a negative, and for some moments could do no more. At last the object that had excited my emotion being no longer in the room, I rose, driven by some inward power stronger than myself, and went towards Mrs. Smith. She, thinking that I meant to take leave, rose too.

"I do not know whether your fly is at the door," said she, "you had better let me ring and ask."

Her hand was on its way to the bell, but I arrested it. She had misunderstood my action in rising. I had not meant to go yet. But now she was virtually dismissing me. I must leave her. What pretext had I for further intrusion? I had come twelve miles in the teeth of circumstances; I had seen and spoken with her, and now I was to leave her. What object had I then served by my wild freak? I had not warned her; I had given her no slightest hint of the peril that to my excited imagination seemed to hang imminently over her. I had been of no least service to her; and now I was leaving her—leaving her to her fate.

It was impossible! It was equally impossible that I should expose myself to her more than probable ridicule by telling her what had

brought me! I embraced a desperate resolution. I still held her hand, which I had seized to prevent her ringing the bell. I was so agitated that I was hardly aware that it was in my clasp, until her face of profound astonishment, almost alarm, betrayed the fact to me.

"I do not know what you will think of me," said I, in a shaking voice; "but I'm going to make what I am afraid you will think a very extraordinary request to you."

"Indeed!" said she, with a perceptible accent of distrust and a decided drawing away of the hand so convulsively clasped by me.

"Yes," said I, going on with feverish haste, now that the ice was once broken, "you see it has happened so unfortunately, the distance was greater than I expected, and then the axle-tree breaking, and the poor fly-

horse is so done that I am sure he could not crawl another mile; in short, I am afraid I must throw myself upon your hospitality, and ask you to give me shelter; to let me stay here for the night."

Out it had come, and now it only remained to be seen how she would take my proposition. At first she was too dumb-founded to utter. I saw at once that the idea of my being deranged crossed her mind; for she looked hard at, and at the same time backed away from me. Then her civility revived.

"Of course!" she said, "of course, I shall be only too delighted!" and then she stopped again.

I saw that, having gained my point, my next task was to convince her of my sanity. I, therefore, with profuse thanks and apologies, and as composed a voice as I could master, asked leave to send

my orders by the flyman back to my coachman at Salcote. I took care that she should hear me give them myself to the man, so that she might know that the broken axle-tree and disabled brougham were not figments of my own diseased imagination. But I do not think that this measure had much effect in removing the suspicion of my insanity from my hostess's mind. I had gone out to the hall door to speak to the flyman, whence we both returned to the drawing-room to begin our sixteen or eighteen hours *tête-à-tête*.

I think that both our hearts sank to our boots at the prospect. I am sure that mine did. In order, perhaps, to abridge it as much as possible, Mrs. Smith soon left me, with some murmured sentence about seeing that my room was comfortable, which it certainly was not. It was, on the

contrary, as I found on being led to it, as uncomfortable as a hastily got-ready bed-room, with a just-lit fire, and a sensation of not having been occupied for some indefinite time past, would naturally be on a biting January night.

Having taken off my bonnet, and made myself as tidy as I could with the aid of Mrs. Smith's brush and comb, and told myself repeatedly that the world had never seen such a fool as me, and that neither the girls nor my husband would ever forgive me, I went downstairs, and we presently betook ourselves to dinner. There we sat opposite to each other in *tête-à-tête*. I had faintly hoped that some female friend, old governess, or cousin might crop up to make a third with us. But no; there we were, we two! We were waited on by the butler, and by him alone.

By questions, whose impertinence Mrs. Smith must have thought only palliated by the unsound state of my mind, I ascertained that the Smith establishment in its normal state consisted of butler and footman, but that the footman had, two days ago, been suddenly taken ill and sent home. The butler was therefore now, in his master's absence, the only man in the house. I also ascertained, during one of his absences from the room, that the stables were at an inconveniently long distance from the house, and that there was no cottage nearer than a quarter of a mile off. Altogether, as lonely a spot as you would wish to see. My eyes travelled uncomfortably and furtively after the man on his return into the room, but I could see nothing in his appearance to justify my terrors. His face had no specially sinister cast. It was

almost as insignificant as his mistress's. And his figure! Could it be possible that the startling resemblance I had traced in it to my dream-figure was only the figment of my horrified fancy?

But no! no! a hundred times no! As I watched the butler, in precisely the same furtively apprehensive way, I was conscious that Mrs. Smith was watching me. Her slow brain had adopted and clung fast to the belief that I was mad; nor, indeed, was that conviction devoid of a good deal of justification. I think that she would not have been at all surprised if I had at any moment risen, and playfully buried the carving-knife in her breast. I have often thought since what a pleasant dinner she must have had. It was over at last. It had seemed enormously long, and yet on our return to the drawing-

room it proved to have been disastrously short; short as women's dinners always are. We had dined at eight, and it was only five-and-twenty minutes to nine. Three hours and five-and-twenty minutes until the period indicated in my dream.

We sat down dejectedly on each side of the fire. I noticed, almost with a smile, that Mrs. Smith took care not to place herself too near me. We had long exhausted our few poor topics of common talk. I had not even any more impertinent questions to ask. It is true that after having run, as we both thought, quite dry already, we had had the good fortune to happen upon a common acquaintance. Very slightly as she was known to either of us, with what tenacity did we cleave to that poor woman! How we dissected her character; anatomised her clothes;

criticised her actions ; enumerated her vices ; speculated on her motives ; about none or all of which we either of us knew or cared a button.

But at last she was picked to the bone, and bare naked silence stared us in the face. What a dreadful evening it was ; saved, to me at least, from the simplicity of bottomless tedium by alternate rushes of burning shame and icy apprehension. At ten o'clock Mrs. Smith could bear it no longer. She rose and rang for candles.

"I daresay that you will not be sorry to go to bed," she said, a sort of relief coming into her tone.

I believe she nourished a secret intention of locking me into my room when once she had got me there.

"After your long drive you will be glad of rest."

"And will you too?" asked I,

stupidly, for she had had no long drive. "I mean are you also going to bed?" She hesitated.

"It would not be much use my going to bed so early; I am a bad sleeper."

"You are not going to bed, then?"

"Not just yet."

"You are going to stay here — in this room, I mean?"

"No, I am going to my boudoir."

A cold shiver ran down me. Her boudoir! That was the room we were sitting in in my dream. There was a moment's pause.

"I wonder," said I, with a nervous laugh, and in a voice whose agitation I could but partially control, "whether you would let me come with you. I—I—am not at all sleepy, after all; it—it is so very early, is not it? I—I—should like to see your boudoir, may I?"

Polite woman as Mrs. Smith was, and had proved herself to be to-night, she could not prevent a flash of acute annoyance, mixed, as I saw, with fear, from crossing her face.

"It really is not at all worth seeing," replied she, stiffly; "and I cannot help thinking that you look tired."

"But I am not, at all," rejoined I, obstinately. "I should like to come with you, if you would let me."

"Of course, if you wish it," said she, grudgingly.

Before finally succumbing, she made one or two more efforts to shake me off. In vain! I was quite immovable. I heard her give an irrepressible sigh of impatience and apprehension at my unaccountable and offensive pertinacity as she preceded me upstairs. We reached her boudoir. It was a common-place room, common-

placely arranged. I had seen hundreds like it, but never to my knowledge, either in waking or sleeping, had my eyes made acquaintance with it before. I looked at once upon entering to see whether the relative position of door and fire-place were the same as those seen in my dream, and also whether there was a clock on the chimney-piece. In both particulars my vision had told me correctly. But, after all, there was nothing very remarkable in this. Most rooms boast a clock, and in many the door is on the left hand of the fire-place. But, to me, it seemed confirmation strong as Holy Writ.

“I told you that there was nothing to see here,” said my hostess, noting my eye wandering round, and speaking in a tone out of which she could not keep all the resentment she felt.

“But it—it is very—very comfortable!” rejoined I, hastily fearing that this was the prelude to a curt dismissal of me. “I should like to stay here a bit with you, if I might.”

She made some sort of murmured sound, which might mean acquiescence, and we sat down. This time we did not even attempt any conversation. She occupied herself with some work that apparently required a great deal of counting; and I—I had no other occupation but my thoughts. I could not well have had a worse one. As I sat there, in silence, listening with ears continually strained to catch some sound that was not swallowed up in the shutter-shaking of the storm-wind, with eyes perpetually travelling to the clock-face, I asked myself over and over again what purpose I hoped to serve, by this apparently so insane procedure of mine?

Were the dream to prove a fallacy, I had made as great a fool of myself as the world—fertile in that product — had ever seen. If, on the other hand, the dream, hitherto proved curiously true in some slight particulars, were to be carried out in its terrible main features, of what avail could I suppose my presence to be in averting the catastrophe with which it concluded. All I had done was to involve myself in Mrs. Smith's fate, which there could be no doubt about my sharing. Again that cold shudder ran over me. I could not help breaking the silence to ask my companion whether she never felt it a little eerie, sitting up here all alone so late at night?"

She answered briefly, "I am not nervous."

"Do you never even take the precaution of locking the door?" asked I, glancing nervously towards it.

She smiled rather contemptuously.

"Never; and even if I wished I should be unable, as I see, what I never noticed before, that the lock is broken."

The clock struck eleven. One hour more! It passed, too, that last hour. It was endless, an eternity, yet it rushed. As it drew towards its last sands I hardly breathed. If Mrs. Smith had once looked up from the stitching at which she was so tranquilly pegging away, she must have seen the agitation under which I was labouring, and would of course have at once assigned it to her old count of insanity. I wondered that she did not hear the thundering of my heart, pulsing so loudly as to impede that intensity of listening into which all my powers seemed to have passed.

How near it was growing! Five minutes, four minutes, three minutes,

two minutes, one minute. I held my breath. I clenched my hands till the nails dug into the palms. Twelve! The clock struck! With that ringing in my head, with that hammering heart, should I hear the knock, even if it came? Mrs. Smith made some slight movement, and I almost shrieked, but I bit in the scream, and listened again. One minute past; two minutes past; three; four; up to twelve! The clock said twelve minutes past twelve. As each minute went by, I drew a longer breath, and my tense nerves slackened. At the twelve minutes past Mrs. Smith looked up —

“Do you feel inclined to go to bed yet?” she enquired. “I am afraid (looking more attentively at me) “that you are more tired than you will allow.”

“I think I will go,” said I, rising and drawing a long breath; “it is ten minutes past twelve.”

"Not quite that," rejoined she; "that clock is ten minutes fast. I must have it regulated to-morrow."

"I must have it regulated to-morrow!" Like lightning it flashed upon me that that was the speech Mrs. Smith had made in my dream immediately before the knock came. The speech I had made such vain efforts to recall. And, as panic-struck, this dawned upon me, someone knocked. A mist swam before my eyes. I tried to speak, but no words would come, and Mrs. Smith apparently did not see the agonised hand I stretched out towards her."

"Come in, she said, phlegmatically.

The door opened, and in the aperture appeared the figure of the butler, with a coal-box in his hand. My horror-struck eyes were rivetted on him, but I could not stir hand or foot. To what purpose if I had?

Were not we alone in the house with him — we two wretched, defenceless women?

Mrs. Smith had, as in my dream, moved to the other side of the room, to the piece of furniture with drawers at which I had seen her standing. Then she looked over her shoulder and said, composedly, "Thank you, Harris; we do not want any more coal to-night." Then, as he seemed, or seemed to me, to hesitate, she added quietly, "I shall not require anything more to-night; you may go to bed."

Could I believe my eyes? Was he really retreating; shutting the door after him? Were those his footsteps, whose lessening sound I heard along the passage? For a moment everything grew dark before me. I clutched the arms of my chair, to assure myself that this was reality and no

dream. Then I staggered to my feet, and towards Mrs. Smith.

"Is he gone?" asked I, in a hoarse whisper.

"Gone!" repeated she, in astonishment, all her old doubts as to my soundness of mind rushing back in flood. "Yes, of course he is gone! Why not?"

"And he will not come back?" still in that husky whisper.

"Of course not. I told him I needed nothing more to-night. I think"—eyeing me distressfully—"that you really had better go to bed; you seem a little—a little—feverish!"

"Yes," said I, making an effort to recover some decent amount of composure, "perhaps I am; I will go to bed if you are quite—quite sure—"

She looked so really alarmed at my manner and words that I did not finish my sentence. I followed her,

still shaking in every limb, to my bed-room, when she left me ; and into which, I am almost certain, though she tried to do it as noiselessly as possible, that she locked me. For hours after she left me I remained, sunk in the armchair by the fire, into which I had almost fallen on entering. I still shook as if ague-struck, and every now and again I held my breath to listen—to listen for that stealthy step which even now I felt must come ;—for the noise of that awful thud which still sounded so loudly in the ears of my imagination that I could not even yet believe that it neither had, nor ever would have, any echo in a real sound.

At length I dropped into an uneasy doze, from which I was awoke by a sensation of extreme cold, to find the fire black out and the temperature of the room at or below freezing point.

I rose and threw myself, dressed, upon the bed, and, wrapping myself in a fur cloak, fell into a heavy sleep, from which I was only roused by the eight o'clock entry of the housemaid.

On first opening my bewildered eyes I could not recollect where I was, but stared round wonderingly at the unfamiliar room. Then recollection came upon me with a rush, and I buried my face in the pillow. Oh, why had I ever woke again? Why had day ever had the inhumanity to dawn again upon such a candidate for Earlswood? As the details of the previous day's incidents came back upon me with brutal vividness, I called to the rocks to fall upon me and the mountains to cover me!

Had anyone since the world first began, ever written themselves down so egregious an ass? Befooled by an idiotic dream; misled by a fancied

resemblance of trivial circumstances ; floundering deeper and deeper into the quagmire of unreason, which had landed me at last, fully dressed, on this strange bed, and with the appalling prospect before me of having to go down and meet Mrs. Smith at breakfast.

She would probably and wisely meet me with a lunatic asylum-keeper and a strait waistcoat. And my children, my servants, my husband, how should I ever look any one of them in the face again ? I writhed. But writhing did not help me. I had seen the housemaid's astonished glance at my full-dressed condition, a fresh proof of my insanity, which would, no doubt, be conveyed to Mrs. Smith.

I must get up. I must go down and appear as soon as I could. That was all that was now left me. And

that much I did. With what inward grovelling, mentally though not apparently on all fours, I entered that dining-room will never be known save only to myself. She came to meet me, civil, dull, unemotional; though I thought I caught a look of lurking apprehension still in her eye.

Stupid woman! Why could not she have been shot through the head, and fallen with that thud I had expected of her? I felt a sort of anger against her for standing there so stolid and sound after having wrought me such irremediable woe.

Oh, that breakfast! Shall I ever forget it? How did I live through it; through it and the moments that followed it, and the leave-taking? At the latter I do not think that I said anything. My tongue clave to the roof of my mouth. I had just sense left to give her my hand

stupidly, and to notice the look of scarcely subdued joy and relief on her face at seeing the last of me.

She sent me in her carriage as far as Salcote, which I thought she looked upon as the surest method of being rid of me. At Salcote I got into my own brougham, and returned home a sadder, if not a wiser, woman. Reader, will you despise me very much if I tell you that I cried the whole way, and that on reaching my own fireside I gathered my children about me and made a clear breast of my folly to them? They took my confession characteristically.

Alice said that if I had taken her advice I should have been spared a great annoyance.

Ruth said that all dreams were nonsense, and reverted to her own puerile one, which even at that moment of humiliation I felt wounded at having paralleled with mine.

And Sue, dear Sue, held both my hands fast in hers, and said she should have done precisely the same in my case.

But I refused to be comforted, the more so as it turned out that the most valuable of the carriage horses had caught in the cold White Hart stables an influenza which was rapidly developing into inflammation of the lungs. But even without that final straw I had sunk hopelessly in my own esteem.

POSTSCRIPT.

JUST a year later the public was shocked by the account of a murder which, in its circumstances, exceeded the measure of brutality usually connected with such crimes.

It was the murder of a lonely old maiden lady by her butler—a butler to whom, as it appeared, she had been in the habit of showing exceptional kindness.

I read the account with about the same degree of shuddering disgust, I suppose, as my neighbours; but without any feeling of a personal character until it transpired, in the course of the evidence, that the murderer's name was Harris — a name by which I had once, and once only, heard Mrs. Smith of Longmains address her butler.

I dismissed the thought at once as far as I was able. Had not I had enough of giving the reins to my imagination? Was not Harris an extremely common name, almost as common as Smith? But when the trial came on, which, as the crime had been committed shortly before the Assizes, it did very soon after the committal to prison, I, perhaps, unknown almost to myself, followed it with a keener interest than, but for this trifling circumstance, I should have done.

The trial was a short one; the evidence overwhelming; the man found guilty, condemned and executed, without any sentimentalist being found to petition the Home Secretary in his favour.

On the evening before his execution he made to the Gaol Chaplain a full confession of his crime; and not only

of that one which brought him to the gallows, but of a previous one which he had been prevented from carrying beyond the stage of intention by a curious accident. What that curious accident was you shall hear, and judge of my feelings on reading the following extract from the murderer's confession :—

“ In January of last year I was living in the service of Mr. Smith of Longmains. I was at very low water at the time, over head and ears in debt, and did not know where to turn for money which I wanted desperately and felt that I must obtain by fair means or foul. My chief inducement for entering Mr. Smith's service had been that I had accidentally heard that he was in the habit of keeping considerable sums of money in the house, for the purpose of paying the weekly wages of the work-

men employed upon some extensive drainage works which he had undertaken.

“ I thought, on reaching Longmains, that I had never seen a house better adapted to my purpose. It was as lonely a spot as I have ever seen ; the stables at an unusual distance from the hall, and no dwelling-house within less than a quarter of a mile. The establishment consisted, as to men, of myself and one footman ; but about a week after my arrival the footman fell ill, and had to be sent home.

“ I had not yet matured my plans, though I had ascertained that Mr. Smith kept his money in a strong box in his business room, and that in the case of his absence, Mrs. Smith had charge of the key, when one morning my master was unexpectedly summoned from home, leaving

me alone with my mistress and the female servants in the house.

“ Such an opportunity, which, very probably, might not soon occur again, was, I felt, not to be lost. Mrs. Smith’s habits were such as to favour my project. She usually sat in her boudoir, situated in a rather isolated part of the house, until late at night. I made up my mind to wait until the rest of the household had retired, and then to go to Mrs. Smith’s boudoir on the pretext of taking coals for the fire, obtain from her the key of the strong box, by fair means if possible; but if she resisted—and she was a resolute woman—I had determined to shoot her through the head, having provided myself with a revolver for the purpose; furnish myself with as much money as I could get hold of, and make tracks for America. I was prevented from carrying out this

intention by a very unlooked for accident.

“Late in the afternoon of that day—the weather was extremely bad, snowing hard, with a high wind and bitter cold—a lady arrived in a fly to call on my mistress. I could see that my mistress was greatly surprised when I took in the lady’s card; for, as far as I could make out, she was very slightly acquainted with her and lived a matter of twenty miles off.

“I have never to this day made out why she came. We all thought she was off her head, and I believe she was. My mistress certainly thought so, all the more when she asked leave to stay the night. I could see that my mistress was very much annoyed, and rather alarmed, but as the lady would not go, there was no help for it; stay she must.

“I was a good deal upset at first,

as I was afraid her being there would knock my plan on the head, but afterwards I comforted myself with the thought that she would be sure to go to bed early, tired with her long drive, and I should find Mrs. Smith alone in her boudoir.

“I lit them their bed room candles in the drawing - room at ten, and then went off to wait. I would not risk it till twelve. By that time everyone would be sure to be in bed and asleep. I thought I never had known time go so slowly, but at last the clock pointed to five minutes to twelve. I put my revolver in my pocket, took up the coal-box, went up stairs, and knocked. Mrs. Smith’s voice said “Come in,” and I opened the door.

“What was my horror to find the strange lady still sitting there with my mistress? The sight of her took

me so aback that I did not know whether to come in or not, and as I was hesitating, Mrs. Smith said, 'We do not want any more coals; you may go to bed, Harris,' or something like that. And all the while the strange lady was staring at me so oddly, as white as a ghost, that I began to think she must have somehow found out what I was after. Her being there and her looking at me like that, altogether made me feel so queer that I actually shut the door and went away again. I thought I would put it off till next night. But on the following day Mr. Smith returned, and I never had another chance!"

I had no sooner reached this last word than I rose to my feet. I was certainly a yard taller than when I sat down.

"Girls!" said I, calling to them in

a voice of solemn authority, and as they gathered round, "Be so good as to read those paragraphs," pointing to them with my finger. I watched their faces as they did so, and when they had finished, I said, turning to Alice, in a voice of more than mortal dignity, "You see that wisdom is justified of her child!"

I was interrupted by the door opening and a lady rushing past the footman to precipitate herself into my arms. It was Mrs. Smith of Longmains come to thank me for having saved her life, and to apologise with tears for having ever thought me ripe for Bedlam.

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